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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

BERGSON: PHILOSOPHY OR ART

by



RICHARD L. DALON

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for
acceptance, a thesis entitled Bergson: Philosophy or Art
submitted by Richard L. Dalon in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date August 18,

---And as for you, you with no eyes, no ears,
No senses, you the most superstitious
Of all--(for what greater superstition
Is there than the mumbo-jumbo of believing
In reality?)--you should be swallowed whole by Time
In the way that you swallow appearances.
Horns, what a waste of effort it has been
To give you Creation's vast and exquisite
Dilemma! where altercation thrums
In every granule of the Milky Way,
Persisting still in the dead-sleep of the moon,
And heckling itself hoarse in that hot-head
The sun. And as for here, each acorn drops
Arguing to earth, and pollen's all polemic.---
We have given you a world as contradictory
As a female, as cabbalistic as the male,
A conscienceless hermaphrodite who plays
Heaven off against hell, hell off against heaven,
Revolving the ballroom of the skies
Glittering with conflict as with diamonds:
We have wasted paradox and mystery on you
When all you ask us for, is cause and effect!---
A copy of your birth-certificate was all you needed
To make you at peace with Creation. How uneconomical
The whole thing's been.

- The Lady's Not For Burning,
Christopher Fry.

ABSTRACT

The principal concern of this thesis is to point out a basic confusion that Bergson makes between the functions of art and philosophy. This confusion arises out of Bergson's attempt to express that which by its very nature cannot be expressed by discursive language. Bergson's confusion between art and philosophy, then, arises principally out of the problem of expression.

Before we are able to understand this problem we must first examine key terms in Bergson's philosophy which directly or indirectly lead him into the problem of expression. In the first chapter we discuss instinct and intelligence in order to show how Bergson eventually allies instinct with intuition; the role of intelligence is also discussed as an apparatus which is primarily pragmatic. The second chapter examines Pure Duration and shows how it unites art and philosophy insofar as it is the object of both. This chapter also establishes the close relationship between intuition and Pure Duration and the intellect's relationship with duration. The third chapter is an examination of Bergson's intuitive method. Here we show just what is involved in the method and how it relates to both philosophy and art. The fourth and most important

chapter deals with the problem of expression. In this chapter we show how both philosophy and art try to solve this problem of expression and the limitations involved in each. On the basis of their attempted solutions we establish the primary difference between art and philosophy--more particularly the Theatre of the Absurd and Bergson's philosophy.

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A very special thanks goes to Miss Yolanda Cole who diligently and patiently corrected the many grammatical errors which occurred in the early drafts, and without whose help and encouragement this thesis would never have been completed. And finally I must acknowledge a debt to Mr. Cameron McEwen, a fellow graduate student in philosophy, who furnished many of the ideas for this thesis during frequent talks and more recently through correspondence while he was in Germany.

PREFACE

Henri Bergson was born in 1859 and his most important and influential works were written between the years 1889 and 1907 with perhaps one exception--The Two Sources of Morality and Religion published in 1932. As a philosopher he has had a rather peculiar and sporadic success. On the North American continent Bergson's popularity reached its zenith between the years 1911 and 1916 and it has been waning ever since. An indication of his being neglected as a philosopher is the lack of critical attention--only three or four books since 1916--by other philosophers. And of the various scattered articles to be found on Bergson few are favorable.

His unpopularity is, no doubt, due to many things; but perhaps at least one explanation may be that his work has never been viewed from the proper perspective and hence criteria which are definitely not applicable have been used. It is certainly true, for example, that many of the ideas presented by Bergson have been proven false by modern science--particularly by the biological sciences and psychology--but surely this is not a reasonable excuse for the rejection of all his works. On the other hand, many of Bergson's "concepts" (he would not use this term) which

have been invalidated by science have been distorted or misrepresented by many into a kind of mysticism unbecoming philosophy or any kind of philosophical investigation.

There are, however, good philosophical grounds on which to criticize Bergson's work. Upon these grounds, then, it is possible to show how Bergson has incorporated a basic confusion throughout his writings. It is the confusion of the function of art and philosophy. And although Bergson was not the first to make this mistake--it was made at least as early as Plotinus, and still continues to this day--he provides us with a paradigm case for study.

That Bergson himself was very much interested in art and the artist can be clearly illustrated by his many references to both throughout his works. And that he exerted a considerable amount of influence on such artists as Péguy, Valéry, Proust, Richardson, Joyce, Kazantzakis, Beckett, Stevens, etc., cannot be denied. The kind of influence which Bergson's works exerted on these artists immediately establishes a close relationship between art and philosophy. We shall show throughout this thesis that this close relationship is due, in part, to their common "object" of interest and also to the method which both attempt to use in order to gain an insight into this common "object." But it is precisely from this close relationship--a relationship Bergson himself was quick to recognize--that the confusion which places his philosophy in jeopardy arises.

We shall not be concerned in this thesis with presenting Bergson's entire philosophy, as has been the case with most of the critical works on Bergson to date; rather we shall concentrate on a few key problems which Bergson deals with and then show how these problems have led Bergson into what we consider his most basic error--that of confusing art and philosophy. We shall attempt to prove that this confusion ultimately arises out of a problem common to both art and philosophy, namely, that of expression. It is this problem which is the central concern of our thesis. By showing that Bergson's philosophy can best be understood as an attempt on his part to overcome the difficulty of expression we hope to establish a new importance for his philosophy. Even though, as we shall see, Bergson ultimately fails in this attempt, our study will nevertheless enable us to see in a new light the relationship between art and philosophy, their very important differences, and a new criterion by which we can judge Bergson's philosophy.

No significant study of Bergson's philosophy has been done from this angle. Most commentators have taken a sweeping approach to it and have succeeded in merely paraphrasing certain Bergsonian notions without ever coming to terms with what we take to be his most serious problem. Even commentators such as T. E. Hulme and Arthur Szathmary who have tried to extrapolate an aesthetic theory from

Bergson's philosophy have not dealt with the problem of expression. They have rightly pointed out that Bergson's philosophy deals with existence--with Being--but neither has indicated why Bergson ultimately fails in his attempt to convince philosophers and others of what he takes to be an accurate account of existence.

The reason for Bergson's failure provides us with a paradigm case by which we can see the limitations of both art and philosophy and the difficulties that arise when an attempt is made to force art to perform the task of philosophy or philosophy to perform the task of art. His failure is not, nor should it be viewed as, a condemnation of his philosophy, but rather as a kind of heroic forerunner in the effort to surmount the problems of language. We must re-interpret and re-evaluate Bergson's philosophy in light of the problem of expression if we hope to gain anything from it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND CHRONOLOGY	xiv
I. INSTINCT AND INTELLIGENCE	1
II. PURE DURATION	19
III. INTUITION	40
IV. EXPRESSION: PHILOSOPHY VERSUS ART	58
TOWARDS A CONCLUSION	94
BIBLIOGRAPHY	101

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND CHRONOLOGY

Bergson's works in chronological order according to the French edition:

Philosophy of Poetry (1884)

Time and Free Will (1889)

T. & F.W.

Matter and Memory (1896)

M. & M.

Laughter: Essay on the Significance of the Comic Laughter
(1900)

Dreams (1901)

Introduction to Metaphysics (1903)

I.M.

Creative Evolution (1907)

C.E.

The Meaning of the War: Life and Matter in
Conflict (1914)

Mind-Energy (1919)

M.E.

Duration and Simultaneity (1922)

The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (1932)

The Creative Mind (1934)

C.M.

Abbreviations of secondary sources in order of occurrence:

The Theatre of the Absurd, Martin Esslin

T.A.

Bergson, Ian W. Alexander

B.

Waiting for Godot, Samuel Beckett

Godot

CHAPTER I

INSTINCT AND INTELLIGENCE

Whenever one discusses Bergson's philosophy, the topic of intuition must inevitably arise. That the intuitive method plays an important role in Bergson's philosophy cannot be denied; however, it is often overemphasized to the exclusion of other philosophical problems which he attempted to deal with. Nevertheless, we too must eventually understand Bergson's intuitive method if we are ever to understand his particular kind of philosophy. But it is important first to see how Bergson conceived of intuition as arising out of a kind of evolutionary growth beginning with instinct and then proceeding to intelligence and finally to intuition. None of these exists as isolated pure states so there are no clear-cut boundaries between them. As Bergson states:

There is no intelligence in which some traces of instinct are not to be discovered, more especially no instinct that is not surrounded with a fringe of intelligence. (C.E., 150)

The same may be said of intuition, which is closely allied to instinct.

Before we continue we ought to clear up a problem

which may arise from the above quotation and others to be cited. Bergson often refers to the "living being," "the intellect," "mind," "body," etc., as if they were quite distinct, although it is clear from the above that this is not the case. The problem of dualism is implicitly and often explicitly stated throughout his works; at times he wants to claim that only the intellect can deal with matter and only intuition can deal with the problems of life. But of course intuition, as we shall show, is a method which involves the intellect. Bergson defines intuition as a kind of "intellectual sympathy." We want to claim that he eventually ends up by viewing intellect and intuition as inseparable. Bergson wants to establish an interaction between mind and matter, between intelligence and intuition. Intuition, the intellect, and even instinct, constitute a circle--though not necessarily a vicious circle--which constantly overlaps. There is not an external world out there, and mind, self, or what have you, inside, but rather, a relationship exists between them. It is not the case that there is an intellect which deals only with matter, and opposite to it, some mystical process, intuition, which deals only with life. They are part and parcel of each other, although this does not mean that a distinction cannot be made between them.

This amounts to saying that theory of knowledge and theory of life seem to be inseparable. . . . It is

necessary that these two enquiries, theory of knowledge and theory of life, should join each other, and, by a circular process, push each other on unceasingly. (C.E., xxiii-xxiv)

Now let us return and see how Bergson distinguishes between "instinct" and "intelligence"¹ and also what the role of intelligence is in Bergson's philosophy. He distinguishes three ways of knowing which correspond to instinct, intelligence and intuition. Often these distinctions are blurred and confused, but we shall attempt to clarify them as much as possible. In this chapter we shall confine ourselves primarily to instinct and intelligence and reserve our discussion of intuition for a later chapter.

Instinct, intelligence and intuition may be imagined as forming a pyramid with instinct at the base, intuition at the apex and intelligence somewhere in the middle; but note that it is instinct and intuition which are most closely allied. It is difficult, if indeed not impossible, to encapsulate these terms in a rigid definition, for as Bergson defines them, "they are tendencies, and not things." (C.E., 151) So we must never expect

¹When we refer to instinct and intelligence we do not have in mind any object but rather the faculty we generally refer to by these names. It might be more accurate to refer to them as concepts (although Bergson would not and does not) and then place them in quotation marks as above. However, for convenience, we shall drop the quotation marks and it shall be understood that we are speaking about the concepts instinct and intelligence.

from Bergson a clear and distinct definition which we can attach to these tendencies. But it does not seem to follow from this that we must give up and never expect to understand them, only that we must try harder to discover their meanings without such clear-cut definitions.

The Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis, who studied under Bergson at the Collège de France, viewed the Dionysian force as being composed of both instinct and intuition and the Apollonian force as intellect. But Kazantzakis eventually combined the two to form what he called the "Cretan Glance." Bergson too insists that although intelligence and intuition are opposite forces they are also complementary, and he also makes the same claim about instinct and intelligence.

Kazantzakis, in a treatise which he wrote on his teacher, Bergson, says about instinct and intelligence:

They are not successive degrees of evolution, they are simply directions which the same fermentation took. Difference of quality and not of quantity exists between instinct and intellect. Instinct knows things, intellect the relationship between things. Both are cognitive faculties. . . . Intuition has the advantage of entering into the very essence of life, of feeling its movement, its creation. But it has one great disadvantage: it cannot express itself. Intellect must therefore work hand in hand with instinct. 'Only the intellect,' says Bergson, 'can seek to solve some problems, though it will never solve them; only the instinct can solve them, though it will never seek them.' There is need, therefore, of absolute

collaboration.²

What is difficult to understand about instinct, intelligence and intuition is just how they constitute three quite distinct ways of knowing. Bergson claims, for example, that

while instinct and intelligence both involve knowledge, this knowledge is rather acted and unconscious in the case of instinct, thought and conscious in the case of intelligence. (C.E., 160)

And further he claims that

instinct perfected is a faculty of using and even of constructing organized instruments; intelligence perfected is the faculty of making and using unorganized instruments. (C.E., 155)

To illustrate the above distinction between instinct and intelligence Bergson uses several examples from the insect world, and in particular the order hymenoptera, in which he feels instinct has reached its peak. A horse-fly lays its eggs on the legs of the horse as if it "knew" that the eggs had to develop in the horse's stomach and that the horse would eventually lick himself and thus convey the larva to the right area. A wasp stings its victim just at those points where the nerve centers lie and just enough to paralyze its victim and not kill it. (C.E., 161) "It

² Kazantzakis, "Henri Bergson," quoted by Kimon Friar in his introduction to Kazantzakis' Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, xvi-xvii.

acts," says Bergson, "like a learned entomologist and a skilful surgeon rolled into one." (C.E., 161) For Bergson, then, the insect "knows" things without having learned them.

One objection to this distinction might be Bergson's use of the term "know." We are normally not inclined to speak of hymenoptera as "knowing," at least not in the same sense that we speak of people "knowing." John knows where he lives; he knows his name; he knows how to drive a car, etc. Now although even the use of "know" in these sentences are in some respects different it is doubtful that they would be termed incorrect or even peculiar. At any rate no one would hesitate in attributing any of these uses of "know" to people. On the other hand, it is unlikely that we would want to say or claim that an ant "knows" that he is an ant; or that a wasp "knows" how to build a house; or even that a bee "knows" how to sting. They do not "know" how to do these any more than we "know" how to breathe or swallow; we simply breathe and swallow. Surely, then, bees "knowing" x or how to do x and John knowing x or how to do x are quite different, and we may even be inclined to say that in the former case "know" has been used incorrectly.

We want to claim, then, that instinct does not constitute a way of knowing. There is no knowledge gained from instinct. Instinct turns out to be an immediate

response to a given stimulus. This definition will enable Bergson to ally instinct with intuition because intuition also turns out to be in part an immediate response. But it will not allow him to align intuition with instinct on the basis of knowledge nor will it allow him to make a distinction between intelligence and instinct on this ground. However, he may make this latter distinction on other grounds; we want to maintain that this can be done by discussing instinct and intelligence in terms of the following: "consciousness," "self-consciousness" and "unconsciousness."

"Consciousness" is here being used in its widest, most general sense. In this sense "consciousness" is almost synonymous with "life." Anything which has the ability to respond to a stimulus we call conscious, as distinct from inert dead material which lacks such power. Consciousness, then, is the possibility of any awareness whatever. In this sense trees and plants are conscious insofar as they can respond to stimuli; however, and this is the important distinction for our thesis, they do not have the possibility of self-consciousness. We are using the term "self-conscious" in its ordinary sense. A man is unconscious when he is asleep or under an anaesthetic; a sleep-walker, although he may be performing rather complicated actions which show he is in some sense aware of his surroundings, is also unconscious of his actions. By

unconscious, then, we do not mean complete absence of self-consciousness; we mean that the self-consciousness that is present is blocked or hindered. Wake the man who is sleeping or the sleepwalker and immediately self-consciousness returns. All our habitual actions fall into this category of unconscious action. We shift gears in a car unconsciously; we ride a bike, swim, etc. unconsciously.

On the other hand, although insects follow a natural disposition and are altogether unconscious of the work they are doing, they are not performing their actions habitually. Thus although instinct is unconscious action it is not action which has become habit, for the possibility of habit never arises. In order for any action to have the possibility of becoming habitual there must be the prior possibility of self-consciousness. Where self-consciousness is a possibility, instinctive or habitual action is also a possibility; however, when self-consciousness is not a possibility, neither is habit. So, in the case of self-consciousness, instinct and habit are almost synonymous, but otherwise instinct at most can be said to be automatic response but never habit. Instinct, then, is always an unconscious and automatic action or disposition because it lacks the possibility of self-consciousness; intelligence, since it has the possibility of self-consciousness, can be either an unconscious action or disposition or a habitual action.

Bergson deals at some length with the functions of the intellect. It is important to examine these because Bergson will eventually use them in order to illustrate that another method must replace that of intelligence. This will be the intuitive method and we shall speak about it in another chapter.

According to Bergson, one of philosophy's chief errors is in thinking that the function of the intellect is primarily speculative. Philosophers think that in its speculative role the intellect attempts to "introduce a certain unity into the diversity of phenomena." (C.E., 168) Since the term "unity" is itself quite vague and since it is not clear that the opposite is not the case--that is, that the intellect might just as easily function to divide rather than to unite--then clearly philosophy has no right to think of the sole function of the intellect in terms of unity or, for that matter, of diversity. Bergson claims that because philosophers (Plato is used as an example) have defined intelligence as speculative, they have attached too much importance to the intellect. They have made it into a kind of absolute. However, intelligence in the Bergsonian sense is quite different.

Human intelligence, as we represent it, is not at all what Plato taught in the allegory of the cave. Its function is not to look at passing shadows nor yet to turn itself round and contemplate the glaring sun. It has something else to do. . . .

To act and to know that we are acting, to come into touch with reality and even to live it, but only in the measure in which it concerns the work that is being accomplished and the furrow that is being plowed, such is the function of human intelligence. (C.E., 209-210)

Whether or not philosophy in general can be linked to this error is an historical question which is of little concern to us; for even if Bergson is wrong to claim that philosophy has attributed this speculative role to the intellect, he may still make this distinction himself. The importance of this position for us is that it will allow us to clear up a problem which will arise later when Bergson speaks of intuition as giving us a kind of knowledge of the absolute.³ Here we hope to discover how Bergson is using the terms "absolute" and "relative." Bergson introduces the idea of relative knowledge in the following manner:

If the intellect proceeds as it does because it wishes to unite, and if it seeks unification simply because it has need of unifying, the whole of our knowledge becomes relative to certain requirements of the mind that probably might have been entirely different from what they are: for an intellect differently shaped, knowledge would have been different. Intellect being no longer dependent on anything, everything becomes dependent on it; and so, having placed the understanding too high, we end by putting too low the knowledge it gives us. Knowledge becomes relative, as soon as the intellect is made a kind of absolute. (C.E., 168)

³See Hegel's Phenomenology for a similar view on "time" as a kind of Pure Duration, which can only be "apprehended through intuition" (Anschauung). Note particularly the Preface, 78ff, and "Absolute Knowledge," 789-808.

In his Introduction to Metaphysics Bergson distinguishes two kinds of knowing and says of them:

The first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol. The first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the relative; the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the absolute. (I.M., 1)

Although at times it appears that in his Introduction to Metaphysics Bergson wishes to claim that the intellect leads to a kind of knowledge which "may be said to stop at the relative" and intuition to a kind of knowledge which may "attain the absolute," it is clear from the passage cited in Creative Evolution that the intellect stops at the relative when we take the intellect to be itself a kind of absolute--that is, as the sole method of knowing. Bergson wants us to recognize the limitations of the intellect, particularly when it uses symbols to express itself. For Bergson, then, "relative" is relative to symbols or language. And since, for Bergson, language cannot adequately express the Absolute or Reality, and in fact distorts it, language yields relative, inaccurate, inadequate knowledge of the Absolute. Why is it impossible for language to express the Absolute? Because by its very nature, the Absolute is contradictory, a forever changing flux, a phantasmagoria of complementary and antithetical images immediately perceptible

but incapable of being expressed simultaneously.⁴ So the real culprit of relativism is language and the reason for this, according to Bergson, is that it diverts us from life, from human existence, insofar as we understand human existence to occur within Pure Duration.

The intellect is not made to think evolution, in the proper sense of the word--that is to say, the continuity of a change that is pure mobility. . . . Suffice it to say that the intellect represents becoming as a series of states, each of which is homogeneous with itself and consequently does not change. . . . So that, though we may do our best to imitate the mobility of becoming by an addition that is ever going on, becoming itself slips through our fingers just when we think we are holding it tight [in language]. (C.E., 179-180)

For similar reasons Ionesco says in discussing Antonin Artaud:

As our knowledge becomes separated from life, our culture no longer contains ourselves (or only an insignificant part of ourselves), for it forms a "social" context into which we are not integrated. So the problem becomes that of bringing our life back into contact with our culture, making it a living culture once again. To achieve this, we shall first have to kill "the respect for what is written down in black and white" . . . to break up our language so that it can be put together again in order to re-establish contact with "the absolute," or, as I should prefer to say, "with multiple reality"; it is imperative to "push human beings

⁴ The Absolute as here described will be equated in the following chapter with Pure Duration or Reality. The relationship between existence and Pure Duration will be discussed in the following chapter and the relationship between the human situation and Pure Duration will be discussed in chapter four.

again toward seeing themselves as they really are."⁵

This problem for the intellect--namely, that of expression--is one which we shall deal with in some detail in a later chapter. It is necessary to mention it now only insofar as it helps us to understand what Bergson means by "absolute" and "relative" knowledge.

We cannot emphasize too strongly the point that neither instinct, intelligence nor intuition ever exists in a pure form. Hence their characteristics often overlap as we shall now see in examining the pragmatic function of both instinct and intelligence in opposition to the purely speculative role of intuition. Both instinct and intelligence are purposeful, both work in order to enable the individual to carry out those functions which are necessary for survival.

Originally, we think only in order to act. Our intellect has been cast in the mold of action. Speculation is a luxury, while action is a necessity. (C.E., 50)

The essential function of intelligence is therefore to see the way out of a difficulty in any circumstances whatever, to find what is most suitable, what answers best the question asked. Hence it bears essentially on the relations between a given situation and the means of utilizing it. (C.E., 166)

⁵Ionesco, "Ni un Dieu, ni un Démon," quoted by Martin Esslin in The Theatre of the Absurd, 299.

For Bergson the intellect functions at its best when it deals with matter, particularly inert solid matter. Matter's most distinguishing characteristic for Bergson is extension; moreover, it is the most general property of the material world.

It [the world] is extended: it presents to us objects external to other objects, and, in these objects, parts external to parts. No doubt, it is useful to us, in view of our ulterior manipulation, to regard each object as divisible into parts arbitrarily cut up, each part being again divisible as we like, and so on ad infinitum. (C.E., 169-170)

Again and again Bergson makes the point that the intellect deals with matter in such a way as always to dissect it into parts and then, after juxtaposing them in space, it attempts to analyze them.

Intelligence is, before anything else, the faculty of relating one point of space to another, one material object to another; it applies to all things, but remains outside them; and of a deep cause it perceives only the effects spread out side by side. (C.E., 192-193)

This is always done with some kind of utilitarian purpose and always with the idea of obtaining a clear and distinct view of the external world. Intelligence, then, perceives the world, first, with a purpose in view and, second, as static or immobile.⁶ Intelligence is essentially external;

⁶The problem of mobility versus immobility will be taken up in the following chapter.

it forces us to regard reality as somehow apart from our life, something that we can overcome. Instinct, however, according to Bergson, is more a kind of sympathy; it is a direct link between the individual and reality; it is internal; it is a powerful force which originates from within the individual, a kind of attitude.

Instinct is sympathy. If this sympathy could extend its object and also reflect upon itself, it would give us the key to vital operations--just as intelligence, developed and disciplined, guides us into matter. For--we cannot too often repeat it--intelligence and instinct are turned in opposite directions, the former toward inert matter, the latter toward life. (C.E., 194)

Some commentators have seen in this contrast between instinct--which will later become intuition--and intelligence, the nascent state of some sort of aesthetic theory.⁷ If we adopt Hulme's position that the intellect acts as a hindrance to the aesthetic experience we come very close to what Edward Bullough is talking about when he claims that a certain amount of "distance" is needed in order to encounter a work of art properly. He refers to this distance as "psychical distance."⁸ This bears mentioning in more

⁷T. E. Hulme in Speculations sees intelligence as a kind of aesthetic hindrance. Arthur Szathmary, in his book The Aesthetic Theory of Bergson, and Newton P. Stallknecht in Studies in the Philosophy of Creation hold similar views in that they claim that intuition and the aesthetic experience are almost synonymous.

⁸Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," in the British Journal of Psychology, V, 1912, 87-98.

detail since it may help us to understand what Bergson means by "sympathy." Bullough's "psychical distance" and Bergson's "sympathy" are closely related. To illustrate what is meant by "psychical distance" let us use Bullough's examples. He tells us to imagine a fog at sea. In many ways it is an extremely unpleasant experience, usually accompanied by fear, anxiety, a kind of terrible anticipation of an impending collision. Aside from all this of course is the purely physical discomfort brought on by the dampness, cold, etc. On the other hand, the fog can be a source of intense pleasure, a kind of aesthetic experience very similar to what we experience in a work of art. Just how are these two experiences of the same event possible? Well, in the second case we have abstracted the unpleasantness of the fog, much as someone abstracts the labor and sheer physical discomfort of climbing a mountain when he reaches the top and begins to appreciate the view. Begin then, to view the fog from a different perspective. Note the way in which the fine white mist seems to envelop the smooth waves which slide up and down producing a grotesque picture. In the background one can almost hear a weird threnody sung by a siren.

What has happened is a different outlook, due as Bullough says, "to the insertion of Distance." The transformation brought about by Distance is produced by allowing the event to stand outside the context of our practical

needs; in short, as Bergson would have it, without any view to action.

It [intelligence] goes all round life, taking from outside the greatest possible number of views of it, drawing into itself instead of entering into it. But it is to the very inwardness of life that intuition leads us--by intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely.

That an effort of this kind is not impossible, is proved by the existence in man of an aesthetic faculty along with normal perception. . . . This . . . is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model. (C.E., 194)

We might think at first glance that when Bullough talks about "abstracting" and "inserting distance" he means just the opposite of what Bergson means by "sympathy" when he claims that we must break down "the barrier that space puts up." But in fact they are quite similar processes. Bullough wants to abstract those things which interfere with seeing the art object as an art object and insert "psychical Distance." Bergson wants to abstract our pragmatic way of looking at things and insert "sympathy"--more precisely, "intellectual sympathy"--a way of perceiving objects without a view towards action.

Bergson's use of "sympathy" is not mystical nor should it be understood as a kind of pantheistic apparatus which allows us to become one with nature. This seems to be what Wilhelm Worringer in his article "Abstraction and

Empathy"⁹ has in mind when he discusses "empathy." By sympathy Bergson simply means a rational endeavor to view things from a different perspective without any utilitarian purpose.

This has brought us to the problem of intuition. But before we elaborate on Bergson's intuitive method, it is perhaps better if we understand first the object or objects of intuition. To put it in the form of a question, why is an intuitive method needed at all? We have spoken of the limits of the intellect, but just what is the barrier which the intellect comes up against and cannot break down? We hope to explain exactly what this barrier is in the following chapter.

⁹Worringer, "Empathy and Abstraction," in A Modern Book of Esthetics, edited by Melvin Rader, 382-391. See also in the same book Vernon Lee's article "Empathy," 370-374 and Theodor Lipps' article "Empathy, Inner Imitation, and Sense-Feelings," 374-382.

CHAPTER II

PURE DURATION

Helen Kazantzakis, in a biography of her husband, relates the following story about Bergson:

The renowned Abbot Mugnier told me that he had once asked his friend, the great philosopher Bergson, how he would concentrate his entire philosophy into a single word. Bergson reflected for a moment. "Mobilization!" he declared.¹

"Mobilization." Surely Bergson could not have chosen a better term to embrace his entire philosophy. We shall discuss in this chapter what Bergson meant by "mobilization" and other terms implied by it such as "duration," "Pure Duration," "existence," "reality," "space" and "time." We shall also have to mention in conjunction with these another term, "intuition," which shall only be dealt with superficially here but which shall be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The first difficulty which Bergson faces in attempting to define Pure Duration is one which confronts many philosophers and all artists; namely, that of expression.

¹Kazantzakis, Nikos Kazantzakis: A Biography Based on his Letters, 443-444.

For Bergson, the problem is how to express in words a process, which by its very nature is repugnant to the essence of language. The problem of expression we shall discuss in detail later but it is well to note it from the start. At best then, Bergson can only attempt to give a description of it.

All problems encountered with duration can be formulated in the following manner: we think "time" in "space" (T. & F.W., 91); or, more accurately, we speak of time in terms of space; we express duration in terms of extensity, and this duration takes the form of a continuous chain, the parts of which touch without penetrating one another. If, however, we could think of time as a succession of qualitative changes which interpenetrate each other such that they cannot be juxtaposed side by side in space--in short, if we could eliminate the idea of space--then we could understand time as being independent of space.

Let us turn first to Bergson's distinction between two ways of viewing reality. The first, "duration," is measurable, quantitative, mathematical time; the second, "Pure Duration" (*durée réelle*), is immeasurable and qualitative. It is the former which most of us are constantly aware of because of our practical natures, for Bergson views our bodies as "centers of action."

In reality, a living being is a center of action. It represents a certain sum of contingency entering

into the world, that is to say, a certain quantity of possible action--a quantity variable with individuals and especially with species. (C.E., 285)

This pragmatic function of the intellect we referred to in the preceding chapter. It is with this view of duration that we are able to communicate with others via the intellect. It is essential then to our everyday living because it allows us, or rather, enables us, to exist in all the trivialities of life which accompany this existence. But this conception of duration, far from being accurate, tends to confuse many issues and to present many pseudo-problems for the philosopher. Bergson cites Zeno's paradox as a paradigm case (M. & M., 250-254).

According to Zeno the flying arrow is motionless. The arrow cannot occupy two successive positions unless two moments are allowed it. At a given moment, therefore, it is at rest at a given point. Since it is motionless at each point of its flight it is motionless during the entire flight. But this is true only if we assume that motion is equivalent to the distance the arrow traverses. This further assumes that motion is divisible and that by plotting the distance the arrow travels we come to some idea of motion. However, according to Bergson, there is more to movement than just a series of points along the way. Positions or points are fixed and immobile and they can never give rise to motion or movement, which is something

else that has been added to them. Hence we can only come to perceive motion by rejecting the intellectual formulation and yielding to an intuitive experience which will give rise to motion itself, which is Pure Duration.

Science, the intellect, the perception of objects with a view towards action conceal Pure Duration and are thereby capable of dealing only with duration or mathematical time.² In fact there is no such thing as immobility, if by that we mean the absence of movement. What we refer to as immobility, to use Bergson's example, is a certain state of things analogous to that produced when two trains move at the same speed, in the same direction, on parallel tracks: each of the two trains, then, is immobile relative to the other. Two passengers in the separate trains can hold hands or talk to each other only if they are "immobile"; that is, if they are going in the same direction at the same speed. "Immobility," then, is a prerequisite for our action and we assume this to be reality. We see in movement something which is superimposed on or added to

² Russell in A History of Western Philosophy attacks this position by claiming that "this view is merely due to the verbal form in which he has stated it and vanishes as soon as we realize that motion implies relations. A friendship, for example, is made out of people who are friends, but not out of friendships." According to Russell then, Bergson's argument is reduced to a mere play on words. This so-called attack seems at best to support Bergson's position or at worst to have no effect on it at all. Or if neither of these is the case then Russell's point has been missed altogether.

immobility. But, according to Bergson, we are working in reverse of what is actually the case. We begin with immobility when we should begin with mobility. We begin with stability instead of change or flux--therein lies our mistake.

The indivisible continuity of change (or "the ineluctable modality of the visible" as Stephen Daedalus would have it) is precisely what constitutes Pure Duration. It is not something mystical and Bergson is eager to point this out.

I shall confine myself therefore to saying, in reply to those for whom this "real duration" is something inexpressible and mysterious, that it is the clearest thing in the world: real duration is what we have always called time, but time perceived as indivisible. That time implies succession I do not deny. But that succession is first presented to our consciousness, like the distinction of a "before" and "after" set side by side, is what I cannot admit. When we listen to a melody we have the purest impression of succession we could possibly have--an impression as far removed as possible from that of simultaneity--and yet it is the very continuity of the melody and the impossibility of breaking it up which make that impression upon us. If we cut it up into distinct notes, into so many "befores" and "afters," we are bringing spatial images into it and impregnating the succession with simultaneity: in space, and only in space, is there a clear-cut distinction of parts external to one another. (C.M., 149)

Bergson supplies us with many examples of what he takes to illustrate Pure Duration but two which constantly crop up in almost all of his works are music and the self. These however are illustrations, examples, or a kind of

schemata of a process. They are to Pure Duration what a paraphrase is to a poem; for Pure Duration turns out to be something quite different than either of these illustrations, just as a poem is always different from its paraphrase. But before we attempt to encounter Pure Duration as Pure Duration (that is, without the aid of any schemata) it may aid us if we take a closer look at the above examples--first, music. Let us reread, in particular, the well-known passage of Time and Free Will:

Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer endure. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another. Might it not be said that, even if these notes succeed one another, yet we perceive them in one another, and that their totality may be compared to a living being whose parts, although distinct, permeate one another just because they are so closely connected? The proof is that, if we interrupt the rhythm by dwelling longer than is right on one note of the tune, it is not its exaggerated length, as length, which will warn us of our mistake, but the qualitative change thereby caused in the whole of the musical phrase. (T. & F.W., 100-101)

This passage might lead us to believe that Pure Duration is "essentially musical," but this is not so. At best musical time provides us with an illustration of Pure

Duration. Gabriel Marcel makes this point quite clear in an article entitled "Bergsonism and Music."

Concrete duration is not essentially musical. At the most--and using a language of which Bergson would, and should, disapprove--one could say that melodic continuity provides us with an example, an illustration of pure continuity that the philosopher must apprehend in itself, in both its universal and concrete reality.³

Here we see the recognition of two distinct elements, namely, actual music and the symbol. Unfortunately, Bergson is never prepared to make this distinction. His naive notion of symbols led him to believe that "real" thought should dispense with symbols as if they were a kind of secondary source of knowledge.⁴ His fight to separate time and space led him to deny any structure at all to Pure Duration. He treats it as a completely formless flow, "the successive notes of a tune by which we allow ourselves to be lulled and soothed." (T. & F.W., 104)

Musical time, however, does have form, organization

³Marcel, "Bergsonism and Music," in Reflections on Art edited by Susanne K. Langer, 145.

⁴Bergson's misconception of the use and function of symbols is apparent throughout his works. This misconception rests on the tacit assumption that all symbolic information is a kind of reification, and the explicit assumption that symbolic information always distorts the original. The problems of this kind of theory of symbols will be dealt with in a later chapter on expression.

and distinguishable parts. In apprehending a melody we are not--or at least, should not be--sleepily dragged along by it. As Marcel contended:

When we speak of the beauty of a melodic line, the aesthetic qualification does not apply to the inner progression, but to a certain figure which is, I repeat, non-spatial, or at least whose extended world can only provide us with symbolizations that we feel are inadequate. . . . As I go from note to note, a certain whole takes shape, a form builds up which can certainly not be reduced to a succession of organic states. . . . It is in the nature of this form to exist, perhaps, only in duration, but also to transcend, in a way, the purely temporal mode according to which it appears.⁵

To regard this kind of musical form and organization as "spatial," as Bergson does, is precisely to miss the real being of music; true musical perception apperceives the form as something dynamic.

But that act of apperception . . . is in no way reduced to the sympathy which makes it possible for me to become one with the phrase, to live it. I would willingly say that this is not a surrender,⁶ but on the contrary, a kind of mastery.

Bergson's Pure Duration is exactly what the composer is attempting to present symbolically. It is not that music presents reality more directly than philosophical discourse, but music presents an emotional reality, an artistic reality, more adequately in this form. But the musical reality

⁵Marcel, "Bergsonism and Music," 146.

⁶Marcel, "Bergsonism and Music," 147.

simply cannot give a discursive account of itself in the end. For this reason art is neither philosophy nor a substitute for philosophy, but is itself something which can be philosophized about.⁷

Now let us turn to the second example of Pure Duration which Bergson offers us--namely, the "self." Reminiscent of Descartes, Bergson says in the opening sentence of Creative Evolution:

The existence of which we are most assured and which we know best is unquestionably our own, for of every other object we have notions which may be considered external and superficial, whereas, of ourselves, our perception is internal and profound. (C.E., 3)

Bergson is referring in this passage to both the epistemological and ontological problem of existence. And what is necessary in order to attempt to understand the problem of our own existence is a painstaking analysis of our own conscious experience. Conscious existence is a privileged case in which we may expect to discover the real nature of existence.

What seems to strike us first about consciousness is that there is nothing static about it. It is comprised of thousands of states which follow each other, mingle and are inseparable from one another. In consciousness I discover that

⁷ This problem of philosophy versus art will be discussed in the chapter on expression.

I pass from state to state. I am warm or cold, merry or sad, I work or I do nothing. I look at what is around me or I think of something else. Sensations, feelings, volitions, ideas--such are the changes into which my existence is divided and which color it in turns. I change, then, without ceasing.⁸ (C.E., 3)

Bergson distinguishes two aspects of consciousness or two aspects of the self. That characteristic of conscious experience which is directly or indirectly traceable to perception we shall call the superficial self, although Bergson does not use this terminology. When, for example, we are aware of our Being--that is, when we have an acute awareness of what it is to be a human being existing in a contradictory world--our conscious experience discloses another aspect of consciousness which Bergson designates as the fundamental self. Let us examine more closely each of these two selves.

Beginning with what we have called the superficial self, we notice that it is with this self that we are concerned most of the time. All that is necessary to experience this self is to perceive, that is, to open our eyes and look about the external world. Our sensations and perceptions, our memories and associations, the conscious states, in short, that occupy themselves with our practical life, our everyday existence, all belong to the superficial

⁸This idea is clearly illustrated by Molly Bloom's monologue in Joyce's Ulysses, 738-783.

self. In this self

we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we "are acted" rather than act ourselves. (T.&F.W., 231)

It is important to observe that these perceptions and memories which make up the superficial self are numerically distinct; they are external to each other, despite the fact that they constitute a unified whole. We have an idea of a bridge, for example, or of the picnic crowd or we remember the baseball game we went to in the afternoon. All these elements come from the spatial order. They all occupied different portions of space when they were first experienced; they are now recalled as if they were spatially related in my present experience of them: they are, to repeat, numerically distinct. The superficial self, then, is spatial, or rather, quasi-spatial because of the spatiality of the objects which it pictures forth and represents.

The notion of time in which this superficial self exists is mathematical time, a quasi-spatial time which we mentioned earlier; it is not real time or Pure Duration but only an inaccurate way of conceptualizing it. In fact, "time, understood in the sense of a medium in which we make distinctions and count, is nothing but space." (T. & F.W., 91) Pure Duration involves more than just a change in position; it involves an enduring of the self in

Pure Duration. The self, and more precisely the fundamental self, is what Bergson wants to relate to the problem of existence. We exist within Pure Duration but because of the nature of the superficial self it is difficult to be aware of Pure Duration and much easier--and certainly more practical--to exist in the pseudo-time of duration.

From this it follows that an analysis of the nature of the superficial self cannot in any way assist us in our efforts to understand existence. We have just attempted to show that to exist means to be in Pure Duration; but since the superficial self does not exist in Pure Duration we cannot expect any help from it. Let us now turn to an examination of the fundamental self in order that we might be better able to understand existence. The time in which this self exists must be real time and its existence real existence, if we are to learn anything about Being.

The fundamental self, of which the superficial self is the "social representation," the "external projection," we observe only rarely and then only by profound introspection. We are so concerned with carrying out our daily activities, with eating, going to work, shopping, etc., those things which sooner or later become habit-like, that the other aspect of our consciousness escapes us. It is just as difficult to break a habit--which Beckett calls "the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit"⁹--as it is

⁹Beckett, Proust, 19.

to reach the fundamental self. But what are some of its characteristic features?

We do not find in the fundamental self anything resembling the externality of elements which, as we have just observed, characterizes the superficial self. On the contrary, there is here an indistinguishable interpenetration of parts which can be defined only as a "qualitative multiplicity" as opposed to the quantitative multiplicity of the superficial self.

The deep-seated self which ponders and decides, which heats and blazes up, is a self whose states and changes permeate one another and undergo a deep alteration as soon as we separate them from one another in order to set them out in space.
(T. & F.W., 125)

The question is whether or not there exists in nature certain things whose parts so interpenetrate that they cannot be separated out. That Bergson thinks such things exist is clear. He refers to them as "intensive magnitudes" and places them in opposition to what he calls "extensive magnitudes." T. E. Hulme also thinks there exist such things and in his book Speculations refers to them as "intensive and extensive manifolds."¹⁰

Extensive magnitudes are measurable and occupy space; on the other hand, intensive magnitudes cannot be

¹⁰ Hulme, "The Philosophy of Intensive Manifolds," in Speculations, 173-214.

measured, although they do admit of degrees of intensity. Physical objects, then, are examples of the former while mental states such as joy, sorrow, fear, desire and the like are examples of the latter. Joy, sorrow, fear and desire do not exist as isolated mental states. They are not quantitative states which can be placed side by side and analyzed as such. There are qualitative differences in our mental states which interpenetrate each other so that the entire process is continuous.

Each emotional state is an individual one. It belongs to a particular personality which is composed of a thousand different elements which dissolve into and permeate each other without any precise outline. In this lies the individuality of the emotion. As soon as you begin to analyze and attempt to describe it in words you destroy all the individuality that the emotion possesses when it occurs. To describe accurately an emotion, then, you would have to describe at the same time an entire personality. Once again we come upon the problem of expression, and although Bergson recognizes this problem he is unsuccessful in achieving any kind of solution. Language and symbolism are ruled out by Bergson because, according to him, they distort reality. Although intuition is a kind of answer it appears that unless we can communicate this particular kind of knowledge, intuition becomes a pseudo-solution, a solution only for the mystic.

The important distinction between the fundamental self and the superficial self is the way in which they view Pure Duration. The former is aware of and exists in real time, Pure Duration, while the latter is only aware of mathematical time although, of course, it too exists in Pure Duration. It is this distinction which allows Bergson to relate Pure Duration and existence. Existence, for Bergson, means existing in Pure Duration and, more important, being aware of this existence--that is, existing on the level of the fundamental self. For a conscious being to exist at the level of the fundamental self is equivalent to enduring.

We are seeking only the precise meaning that our consciousness gives to this word "exist," and we find that, for a conscious being, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly. (C.E., 10)

Now as we have seen, to exist is to endure in Pure Duration and this existence implies change, and change, we want to claim, implies a struggle. This struggle (which may manifest itself in terms of a physical, emotional or spiritual conflict, as in coming to grips with oneself, not meant in a superficial way) is usually avoided because most people are too busy with trivial everyday concerns.

It is Heidegger who best describes this kind of "living." And it may help us to pause for a moment and examine some of Heidegger's comments on this subject. For

Heidegger the "they" who exist in average "everydayness" are called das Man. Das Man is Heidegger's answer to the question of who it is that Dasein is in average everydayness.

One belongs to the Others oneself and enhances their power. 'The Others' whom one thus designates in order to cover up the fact of one's belonging to them essentially oneself, are those who proximally and for the most part 'are there' in everyday Being-with-one-another. The "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people (*einige*), and not the sum of them all.¹¹ The 'who' is the neuter, the "they" (das Man).

And further on Heidegger continues with a description of das Man.

This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of 'the Others,' in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. . . . We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they (man) take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as they shrink back; we find 'shocking' what they find shocking. The "they" [das Man], which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.¹²

Das Man, it is true, may undergo some kind of transformation but this transformation has usually taken place in adolescence or soon after. Das Man is then content

¹¹ Heidegger, Being and Time, 164 (126).

¹² Heidegger, Being and Time, 164 (127).

to accept the kind of existence he has now assumed and afterwards explains everything by phrases like: "This is the way I am," or "I am the kind who" Das Man soon finds an ecological niche and rarely if ever attempts to wander far from this secure strata in which he somehow finds himself.

Bergson no doubt would not entirely agree with Heidegger's position but the similarity on this particular subject cannot be denied. The difference appears to be that for Heidegger this kind of life is not to be condemned even though he refers to it as an "inauthentic mode of existence." Bergson, on the other hand, makes a plea for change. And the kind of change he advocates is not that of das Man but more like the constant change to which Nietzsche refers in his poem "From High Mountains," particularly the line which reads, "One has to change to stay akin to me,"¹³ which closely parallels Rilke's line, "Choose to be changed," from his "Sonnets to Orpheus."¹⁴ This is also the kind of change Bergson has in mind--that is, a process, a kind of continual growth. For Bergson as well as for Rilke or Nietzsche, it is an invitation, a challenge to accept the most dangerous and difficult life possible.

¹³ Nietzsche, "From High Mountains," in Basic Writings of Nietzsche, 433.

¹⁴ Rilke, "Sonnets to Orpheus" in Selected Works, 274.

And in a general way, in the evolution of life, just as in the evolution of human societies and of individual destinies, the greatest successes have been for those who have accepted the heaviest risks. (C.E., 146)

But one might ask, "What exactly is Pure Duration?" We have so far, excluding an occasional reference to existence, spoken only of the concrete examples. But from the beginning we have maintained that these are only schemata or examples of Pure Duration and not Pure Duration qua Pure Duration. We have already mentioned or hinted at the answer in our first chapter when we discussed what Bergson meant by absolute knowledge. Pure Duration turns out to be Reality, the Absolute or, more precisely, "multiple reality." It encompasses every aspect of life. It is love, hate, war, peace, fear, anxiety, death, birth, struggle, change, flux, existence, becoming, the human situation and the relationships among them. It is forces in opposition continually defying understanding. Bergson groups all these under the single title of Pure Duration. Why is it that we are not always aware of reality as such? It is because, from Bergson's point of view, we perceive everything as static, immobile; Pure Duration is viewed from behind blinders--the "habit" of Beckett. Pure Duration is often contradictory--it entails antinomies and opposites--and for this reason is extremely difficult to communicate. Pure Duration is closely akin to what Wallace

Stevens refers to in his book The Necessary Angel:

It is as if a man who lived indoors should go outdoors on a day of sympathetic weather. His realization of the weather would exceed that of a man who lives outdoors. It might, in fact, be intense enough to convert the real world about him into an imagined world. In short, a sense of reality keen enough to be in excess of the normal sense of reality creates a reality of its own.¹⁵

It is this view of reality, "keen enough to be in excess of the normal sense of reality," which is real in the most important sense for Bergson. It is not that we are denying the reality of tables and chairs but only that we are acknowledging the insignificance of their reality. In Bergson's terms it is perceiving reality as Pure Duration or as mathematical time. Neither is more real than the other, but the difference lies in their importance. For Bergson as well as for other philosophers, what is important is attempting to express this Pure Duration, the human situation, Being.

This is surely the interest of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre. Who else shares this keen interest with equal enthusiasm? The artist. Pure Duration establishes a bond between the artist and the philosopher. Both see it as important; both wish to communicate their own individual evaluation of what it means to be a human being. Both

¹⁵ Stevens, The Necessary Angel, 79.

wish to get at the very nature of Reality.

Thus, if we desire to formulate an accurate theory of poetry, we find it necessary to examine the structure of reality, because reality is the central reference for poetry.¹⁶

Thus we see that art and philosophy are closely related.

They both have as their objects of reference, Reality, as we have defined it in terms of Pure Duration.¹⁷ The problem of how to understand, how to gain a direct insight into reality, is precisely what Bergson is attempting to deal with. He wants to provide philosophers with a philosophical key which will open the door to reality. He concludes that somehow artists already possess this tool and although philosophers are aware of its existence they are reluctant to utilize it. Bergson calls it the "intuitive method," a method which is capable of transcending the quasi-time of the intellect and plunging

¹⁶ Stevens, The Necessary Angel, 71.

¹⁷ It may be argued that not all philosophy has Reality--at least Reality as we have conceived it--as its main concern. Logic and Philosophy of Science no doubt are examples of disciplines not concerned with this view of Reality. However, for the purpose of this thesis we shall limit our discussion to those branches of philosophy which we feel have an interest in Reality as we have defined it, such as Phenomenology and Existentialism. From a Bergsonian point of view the other branches of philosophy have as their object duration. This is not in any way a condemnation on Bergson's part, merely a recognition of conflicting interests and priorities.

directly to the depths of Pure Duration. We are now ready to examine Bergson's intuitive method which is the principal concern of the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

INTUITION

Bergson's philosophy does not constitute a system which is complete enough to permit either acceptance or rejection; it is more like a process which may perhaps never be complete and hence not only stands in need of repair and improvement but also is in a state of continuous development. So it is with his intuitive method; it also stands in need of repair and improvement. It has been this aspect of Bergson's philosophy--that is, intuition--that has come under attack most often. Many of the claims held by Bergson's commentators are due more often than not to the misinterpretation of Bergson's notion of intuition. It is generally thought by commentators¹ that Bergson's intuitive method is some rather vague and strange, ethereal mystic communion or instinctive foresight. We shall have to dispense with these views in order to attempt to show that intuition does not fall prey to these sorts of criticism.

We have attempted to show in our first chapter that intelligence primarily functions with a view toward action.

¹In the long list we could include A. D. Lindsay, A. Lovejoy, Susanne Langer, J. McKellar Stewart and others.

The function of the intellect is to preside over actions. (C.E., 325)

It is for this reason that intelligence succeeds so well in the sciences. For according to Bergson the sciences have ultimately a practical aim. What is the essential object of science?

It is to enlarge our influence over things. Science may be speculative in its form, disinterested in its immediate ends: in other words we may give it as long a credit as it wants. But, however long the day of reckoning may be put off, some time or other the payment must be made. It is always then, in short, practical utility that science has in view. Even when it launches into theory, it is bound to adapt its behavior to the general form of practice. However high it may rise, it must be ready to fall back into the field of action, and at once to get on its feet. This would not be possible for it, if its rhythm differed absolutely from that of action itself. (C.E., 358)

Since science has as its object that which is also primarily the object of the intellect, science also is faced with the same kind of limitations.

But, preoccupied before everything with the necessities of action, the intellect, like the senses, is limited to taking, at intervals, views that are instantaneous and by that very fact immobile of the becoming of matter. (C.E., 297)

Both science and the intellect are restricted, then, to a static view of reality. They take, to use Bergson's term, a "cinematographical" view of reality. And this is precisely what constitutes their limitations; they are only

capable of dealing with reality as if it were static, immobile. This is the view of reality which we have discussed as duration or mathematical time. It is important to note here, however, that Bergson does not view these limitations from a derogatory perspective; that is, he is not establishing a hierarchy in which metaphysics is at the top and science at the bottom. They are just two different methods of viewing Pure Duration.

What is wanted is a difference in method between metaphysics and science: I do not acknowledge a difference in value between the two. . . . Metaphysics, then, is not the superior of positive science; it does not come, after science, to consider the same object in order to obtain a higher knowledge of it. . . . It is my belief that they are, or that they can become, equally precise and certain. They both bear upon reality itself. But each one of them retains only half of it so that one might see in them, if one wished, two subdivisions of science or two departments of metaphysics, if they did not mark divergent directions of the activity of thought. (C.M., 43-44)

On the other hand, there are times when it appears that Bergson does not really believe this. He says it with tongue in cheek, somewhat like Heidegger when he claims equal importance for "inauthenticity" and "authenticity." Perhaps it would be more accurate to claim that the metaphysical view of Pure Duration is better when doing metaphysics and the scientific view of Pure Duration is better when doing science. We shall refer to this problem again in a moment but now let us continue with Bergson's idea of

the "cinematographical method." Bergson describes this method in the following manner:

Suppose we wish to portray on a screen a living picture, such as the marching past of a regiment. There is one way in which it might first occur to us to do it. That would be to cut out jointed figures representing the soldiers, to give to each of them the movement of marching, a movement varying from individual to individual although common to the human species, and to throw the whole on the screen. . . . Now, there is another way of proceeding, more easy and at the same time more effective. It is to take a series of snapshots of the passing regiment and to throw these instantaneous views on the screen, so that they replace each other very rapidly. This is what the cinematograph does. With photographs, each of which represents the regiment in a fixed attitude, it reconstitutes the mobility of the regiment marching. It is true that if we had to do with photographs alone, however much we might look at them, we should never see them animated: with immobility set beside immobility, even endlessly, we could never make movement. (C.E., 331)

But remember that we have already maintained in the preceding chapter that what Bergson wants to give philosophers is the key which will open the door to Pure Duration. The intellectual key does not fit this lock; no matter how hard we try to force it, the door remains closed. This idea that the intellect has been designed for practical purposes is surely not limited to Bergson. Schopenhauer held a similar view of the intellect.

The intellect is designed for the will's service, and hence for the comprehension of motives; to this it is adapted, and so it is thoroughly practical in tendency. . . . Such a faculty of knowledge,

existing exclusively for practical ends, will by its nature always comprehend only the relations of things to one another, not their inner nature as it is in itself.²

This should not lead us to believe that there exist two realities side by side, duration and Pure Duration; the truth is that there exist two quite different methods of viewing the same Reality--intelligence and intuition.

Bergson does not claim, as we have just pointed out, that one method is more correct or even better than the other; however, we shall maintain that they have a different status. The intellect is grounded in utility; it has a pragmatic status. Intuition is grounded in immediate awareness; it has an ontological status. Intuition derives this status from its very nature. It can gain a direct insight into the Absolute, or Pure Duration as we have defined it in the preceding chapter, for "an absolute can only be given in an intuition." (I.M., 7) Intuition attempts to obtain insights into Pure Duration by an immediate experience. As I. W. Alexander notes:

If being is as it appears to consciousness, ontological enquiry must proceed on the basis of the description of what the phenomenologist calls the 'ontic,' of what is exhibited in immediate experience. (B., 11)

² Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, II, 285. See also the chapter "On the Essential Imperfections of the Intellect," II, 137.

As for what is to be intuited, Alexander appears to agree with us when we speak of the object of intuition as being Pure Duration or "multiple reality."

The intuition of duration [Pure Duration] also tells us much about the nature of this reality or absolute. It is revealed as being a structure or organic totality. What characterizes any such 'reality' is the mutual implication of its parts. . . . The model is psychic duration, which is a fusion of heterogeneous parts so structured that each moment is absorbed into the following one, transforming it and being transformed by it, with the consequent transformation of the whole. (B., 11)

Because reality is conceived of as such it is impossible to understand it--in the important sense of understanding--with the intellect. It is impossible because the intellect attempts to analyze the whole into separate parts juxtaposed in space. Surely we do not mean to infer that the knowledge we gain from the intellect is not important, if we mean by important, useful. No one who has ever gone into the woods with a minimum of equipment for an extended period of time will doubt the importance of science in terms of the many devices we have become accustomed to. Even though the intellect has limitations insofar as it cannot grasp reality completely, we do not mean that it must forever be condemned to occupy a position inferior to intuition. We only mean that in order to claim the importance which we want to claim for intuition we must be able to understand Pure Duration with all its implications. Intuition, however,

without the intellect is useless. For although intuition may be able to allow us to gain insights into Pure Duration it is not capable of expressing them. The problem of expression then must ultimately rest with the intellect, and this we shall deal with in our next chapter.

How does intuition function? How is it able to provide us with insights into Pure Duration which the intellect cannot? What are the characteristics which make it unique? The following quotation is an attempt by Bergson towards a definition of intuition:

By intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible [at least with concepts and symbols]. (I.M., 7)

This is contrasted with analysis which is

the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is, to elements common both to it and other objects. To analyze, therefore, is to express a thing as a function of something other than itself. (I.M., 7)

Analysis, which, according to Bergson, is one of the functions of the intellect, is usually performed in order to somehow give us a clear understanding of the whole. Bergson merely wishes to show that knowledge or understanding given to us through analysis is quite different from that which we receive from an intuition or an immediate comprehension of the whole.

Were all the translations of a poem into all possible languages to add together their various shades of meaning and, correcting each other by a kind of mutual retouching, to give a more and more faithful image of the poem they translate, they would yet never succeed in rendering the inner meaning of the original. A representation taken from a certain point of view, a translation made with certain symbols, will always remain imperfect in comparison with the object of which a view has been taken, or which the symbols seek to express. But the absolute, which is the object and not its representation, the original and not its translation, is perfect, by being perfectly what it is. (I.M., 5-6)

There are two problems involved here. One is primarily an aesthetic problem--understanding in what sense the poem is an "object"; the other involves attempting to discover the relationship between the poem and the Absolute. The poem can be an object in quite a trivial way if we mean by object here the printing on the page. In this case, however, there are many objects of a single poem, assuming there is more than one copy of the poem. Or we can claim that the "meaning" of the poem is the object. There are other possibilities, for example the "type, token" theory;³ however, we need not be concerned with these theories here. We merely wish to point out that there is an aesthetic problem involved no matter which choice we finally make. In the first case there exists a tangible object--the poem as print. In the second case there is no tangible object. Nevertheless we wish to claim, with Bergson, that it is an

³See Stevenson's article, "On 'What is a poem?'" The Philosophical Review, LXVI (1957), 329-362.

object in the same sense that the Absolute is an object, namely that they are both objects of the same thing--intuition. We can have knowledge of a poem just as we can have knowledge of the Absolute. Both are objects, although not tangible objects. We must remember that we have repeatedly maintained (particularly in the preceding chapter) that the Absolute is synonymous with Bergson's Pure Duration. This has in turn been defined as embracing all of Reality, that is, the human situation, matter, the contradictory flux, etc. In short, it is the external world, the subjective internal self and the relation between the two.

From this it appears to follow that there are at least three possible relationships which can exist between the poem and the Absolute. First, the poem as print can be equivalent to the Absolute; second, the poem as "meaning" can be equivalent to the Absolute; or thirdly, the poem as "meaning" can represent or symbolize the Absolute. We can eliminate the first, since the poem as print turns out to be trivial. It is the second possibility which Bergson wants to claim, and we wish to suggest that the third is a much stronger position and that Bergson can only be made intelligible if his error is corrected.

Let us first examine what we take to be Bergson's position, namely that the poem as "meaning" is coincident with the Absolute. It follows from the passage quoted that the translation is to the poem as analysis is to the

Absolute. According to Bergson, then, both translation and analysis are once removed from the original or reality. Since this is the case then it follows that Bergson's position is clearly that which we have just stated, namely, that the poem as "meaning" is coincident with the Absolute. But this is difficult to understand; for given that the Absolute is equivalent to Pure Duration, as we have continually defined it, then in what sense is the poem coincident with the Absolute? In what sense is the poem a flux, a contradiction? It is one thing to claim that the poem symbolizes or represents the Absolute and quite another to claim that the poem is the Absolute. Alexander mentions the problem when he claims:

The problem of art is, in fact, to infuse into disconnected symbols mental duration. . . . The 'time' of the work of art is not then either the pure time of psychical experience [Pure Duration] nor the pure space of pure perception, but a new spatio-temporal. It exists in its own right within its own space-time. (B., 92)

There are two important methods by which we can understand a poem: the intuitive method, which is an immediate apprehension of the poem qua poem, the poem viewed as a whole; and analysis, which Bergson claims is the method of the intellect. The former takes its stand from "within" the poem itself; that is, it views the poem as a unified whole so that we are dealing with the original. It appears that this is what Bergson means when he claims

that "philosophy consists in placing oneself within the object itself by an effort of intuition." (I.M., 43) On the other hand the intellect, insofar as it insists on dissecting the object in order to place the parts side by side in space, takes a stand "outside" the original: "outside" in the sense that it is dealing not with the poem itself but with an analysis, a critical interpretation of the original. And all the analysis or criticism possible will never get us back to the original.

But the error [that is, of thinking the symbol, interpretation, etc. is equivalent to the original] consists in believing that we can reconstruct the real with these diagrams. As we have already said and may as well repeat here--from intuition one can pass to analysis, but not from analysis to intuition. (I.M., 48)

And for Bergson analysis is the tool of the intellect;⁴ analysis as we have just noted is also once removed from the original. Hence one of the reasons for the limitations of the intellect, analysis, language and the symbol is that all attempt to "express a thing as a function of something other than itself." The intellect attempts to express Pure Duration in terms of language; analysis attempts to discover the meaning of a poem by dissection and eventually by expressing a meaning in a language other than poetry; the symbol attempts to express or represent the original without being

⁴ For variant uses of the term in aesthetics see Stevenson's article "On the 'Analysis' of a Work of Art," reprinted in Contemporary Studies in Aesthetics edited by Coleman, 69-84.

the original. It seems, then, that all these limitations can be reduced to one of language or again, as we have often mentioned, of expression. That a translation is not the original poem, that a symbol is not exactly the same as that which it symbolizes, may appear at first glance to be tautological and hence trivial; but it is only trivial if we take this relationship between expression and what is to be expressed as having a one to one correspondence. That they are not the same is fairly clear, but in what sense they are not the same is quite complex.

These limitations of language, the symbol, the intellect, etc., lead Bergson to claim that

Metaphysics, then, [because of the above mentioned limitations] is the science which claims to dispense with symbols. (I.M., 9)

But this, of course, is only true given Bergson's naive view of symbolism. Although, as we mentioned before, we shall not attempt to refute Bergson's idea of the function of the symbol with a detailed discussion of symbolism--a complex problem which would require a thesis in itself--we shall have reason to return to this problem in our next chapter.

Let us for a moment return to the problem of the function of intuition. First and foremost intuition allows us to gain a direct insight into Pure Duration.⁵ It

⁵Note the similarity between Bergson's intuition and Hegel's intuition (Anschauung); note especially the Preface to The Phenomenology, 108.

enables us to see, not just the external objective world, nor just the internal subjective world, but rather the relationship between the two. What prevents us from normally viewing the world as a kind of interaction between subject and object? It is, according to Bergson, our insistence on viewing everything from a utilitarian perspective. We see only what we want to see, only what can be useful to us. The primary interest of ordinary perception is a practical one. (See the epigraph.)

But if the nervous system is thus constructed, from one end of the animal series to the other, in view of an action which is less and less necessary, must we not think that perception, of which the progress is regulated by that of the nervous system, is also entirely directed towards action, and not towards pure knowledge? (M. & M., 21)

The answer Bergson gives is yes. Our ordinary perceptions arise from the necessity to act. We need some way to integrate these images⁶ in order that they may coincide with the continuity of our experience. This can be accomplished only if the senses can be educated to perceive objects other than those which answer our practical needs.

To give up certain habits of thinking, and even of perceiving, is far from easy: yet this is but the negative part of the work to be done; and when it

⁶Bergson defines "images" in the following way: "And by 'image' we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing,--an existence placed half-way between the 'thing' and the 'representation.' " (M. & M., xi-xii)

is done, when we have placed ourselves at what we have called the turn of experience, when we have profited by the faint light which, illuminating the passage from the immediate to the useful, marks the dawn of our human experience, there still remains to be reconstituted, with infinitely small elements which we thus perceive of the real curve, the curve itself stretching out into the darkness behind them. . . . The final effort of philosophical research is a true work of integration. (M. & M., 241-242)

However, for Bergson, the clearest evidence of intuition is in the works of great artists. They see more than the ordinary person and they attempt to allow others to do the same. Artists do not see something which is not there and available for everyone, but they are able to discard those things which the ordinary man sees with a view toward action or what has become for him habit, and to perceive them as unique. The artist attempts to arouse man from his "everydayness" so he can see and understand what it really means to exist. Perhaps it is this type of existence, that of "everydayness," which Schopenhauer had in mind when he wrote:

At the moment of the tragic catastrophe, we become convinced more clearly than ever that life is a bad dream from which we have to awake.⁷

The ordinary person has eyes but does not see, he has ears, but he does not hear, and the artist, like the prophets of the Bible, must make us see and hear that which we normally

⁷ Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, II, 433.

pass over. Bergson maintains that the object of art is to bring reality "into direct contact with sense and consciousness," to "enter into immediate communion with things and with ourselves." (Laughter, 157) It is a more direct insight into reality. It involves a break with utilitarian conventions which act as a veil between us and reality, between ourselves and our own consciousness. We must break the habit which Beckett speaks of and attempt to come to grips with a less conventional reality, with what Camus calls the "absurd."

Rising, tram, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm--this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. 'Begins'--this is important.⁸

The artist does not select only those things which are useful; he perceives "the actual things" instead of confining himself to "reading the labels affixed to them." (Laughter, 159) Bergson continues:

And thus he [the artist] realises the loftiest ambition of art, which here consists in revealing to us nature [Pure Duration or Reality]. Others, again, retire within themselves. Beneath the thousand rudimentary actions which are the outward and visible signs of an emotion, behind the commonplace, conventional expression that both reveals

⁸Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, 18.

and conceals an individual mental state, it is the emotion, the original mood, to which they attain in its undefiled essence. And then, to induce us to make the same effort ourselves, they contrive to make us see something of what they have seen; by rhythmical arrangement of words, which thus become organised and animated with a life of their own, they tell us--or rather suggest--things that speech was not calculated to express. (Laughter, 161)

So art, whether it be painting or sculpture, poetry or music, has no other object than to brush aside the utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself. (Laughter, 162)

But again, none of this is to be taken in a mysterious sense. The artist's vision does not transcend perception. On the contrary, Bergson maintains that rather than transcend perception we must simply deepen and expand our normal perception.

But suppose that instead of trying to rise above our perception of things we were to plunge into it for the purpose of deepening and widening it. Suppose that we were to insert our will into it, and that this will, expanding, were to expand our vision of things. (C.M., 134)

And how is this to be accomplished?

Our attention can increase precision, clarify and intensify. . . . For hundreds of years, in fact, there have been men whose function has been precisely to see and to make us see what we do not naturally perceive. They are the artists. (C.M., 135)

These examples are all illustrations of the intuitive method. This method is neither mystical nor incomprehensible. It amounts to a kind of "intellectual sympathy"; sympathy in the sense which we have spoken of earlier--that is, something which resembles Bullough's "psychical distance"--an awakening or deepening of our normal perception. It is a method which Bergson claims is used by all artists and ought to be used by philosophers.

Bring our perception back to its origins, and we shall have a new kind of knowledge without having been obliged to have recourse to new faculties.

. . . Let us on the contrary grasp ourselves afresh as we are, in a present which is thick, and furthermore, elastic, which we can stretch indefinitely backward by pushing the screen which masks us from ourselves farther and farther away; let us grasp afresh the external world as it really is, not superficially, in the present, but in depth, with the immediate past crowding upon it and imprinting upon it its impetus; let us in a word become accustomed to see all things sub specie durationis: immediately in our galvanized perception what is taut becomes relaxed, what is dormant awakens, what is dead comes to life again. Satisfactions which art will never give save to those favored by nature and fortune, and only then upon rare occasions, philosophy thus understood will offer to all of us, at all times, by breathing life once again into the phantoms which surround us and by revivifying us. (C.M., 128-129)

However, when Bergson speaks of philosophy he is usually referring to metaphysics, and by "metaphysics" he means the philosophy of existence. He wants philosophy, by using the intuitive method which we have outlined in this chapter, to somehow come to terms with the problem of

existence. He wants to explore Pure Duration, that contradictory flux which actually constitutes existence, and somehow communicate this knowledge (albeit a very peculiar kind of knowledge) to others. If the knowledge gained by the intuitive method is incommunicable and inexpressible then intuition turns out to be useless, a mystical experience, or as Susanne Langer has pointed out

so close to mystical experience that it really eludes philosophical analysis; it is simply a sudden illumination, infallible knowledge, rare,⁹ and incommensurable with the rest of mental life.

If Bergson is correct in claiming that both symbols and language distort reality, principally because they make static what is mobile, then how are we to express this knowledge? What methods of expression can we use? Is philosophy equipped to perform such a function or is art better suited for this particular purpose? These questions bring us face to face with the problem to which our thesis has inevitably been leading us. It has been implicitly or explicitly implied in every preceding chapter, namely, the problem of expression. It is now time to examine this problem more carefully.

⁹Langer, Feeling and Form, 375.

CHAPTER IV

EXPRESSION: ART VERSUS PHILOSOPHY

Throughout our preceding chapters we have attempted to show that Bergson's Pure Duration is equivalent to the following: Reality, the Absolute, multiple reality, mobility, flux. We now wish to make the further claim--although this too has been to some extent implied throughout our preceding chapters--that Pure Duration is significantly related to the human situation. We exist in Pure Duration in the same way that Heidegger wants to talk about existing in the world or, more precisely, "Being-in-the-world." "World," in this sense, does not necessarily mean the world as observed by the scientist, a kind of ball revolving around the sun, rather "world" is a personal world: "It may be a small village but it is still my world." It is the most general concept about existence--the place in which one is. "Being-in-the-world" is not like peas in a jar.

Being-in . . . is a state of Dasein's Being; it is an existential. So one cannot think of it as the Being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) 'in' an entity which is present-at-hand. Nor does the term "Being-in" mean a spatial 'in-one-another-ness' of things present-at-hand, any more than the word 'in' primordially signifies a spatial relationship of this kind. . . . "Being-in" is thus the formal existential

expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state.¹

We wish to claim the same kind of status for existing in Pure Duration as Heidegger does for "Being-in-the-world." If we wish to define all the characteristics of the human situation we would also have to include a description of Pure Duration and eventually come to understand that the two are quite inseparable. There is not Pure Duration out there and us here, though that is how we normally view the relationship, because, as we have often repeated before, we are viewing Pure Duration as duration. And conversely if we wish to describe all the characteristics of Pure Duration we would have to include the human situation, since neither exists apart from the other. Hence whenever we refer to Pure Duration we are also referring to the human situation and the interaction between them, and the same can be said when we refer to the human situation.

Pure Duration as we have continually maintained is the object of both art and philosophy. And as we have mentioned earlier we shall have to limit philosophy to those disciplines which are concerned with existence, such as Phenomenology, Metaphysics, Existentialism and the like. Logic, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Language, etc. we shall equate more with science in the broad sense and

¹Heidegger, Being and Time, 79-80 (54).

with disciplines which have as their object of study duration or mathematical time.² That philosophy, at least Bergson's philosophy, has Pure Duration as its object has been discussed in the preceding chapters; however, a few quotations from Bergson might help to refresh our memory.

For me it [intuition] was a question, above all, of finding true duration. (C.M., 30)

In short, pure change, real duration, is a thing spiritual or impregnated with spirituality. Intuition is what attains the spirit, duration, pure change. (C.M., 33)

To metaphysics, then, we assign a limited object, principally spirit [Pure Duration], and a special method, mainly intuition. (C.M., 37)

That art has Pure Duration as its object of concern is well illustrated by Wallace Stevens' statement concerning the subject-matter of poetry:

The subject-matter of poetry is not that "collection of solid, static objects extended in space" [note that this is taken from Bergson] but the life

² While it is true that this is quite an arbitrary distinction among the many branches of philosophy, and it might well be argued that some branches could be placed on either side of the dividing line, we shall not argue the point here. We are willing to concede that the object of some branches of philosophy is ambiguous; however, we merely wish to point out a distinction between those philosophies concerned with existence and those concerned with something quite different. We should like to emphasize that the disciplines themselves are of equal importance and only their objects appear to vary with respect to certain quite arbitrary priorities established by Bergson and others.

that is lived in the scene that it composes; and so reality is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it.³

There seems to be little doubt that art is primarily concerned with the human situation.⁴ The relationship between art and philosophy is established by their object of investigation and also by their method. We have tried to show in the preceding chapter that both the artist and the philosopher do in fact employ the intuitive method as a means of gaining an insight into Pure Duration. This has led Bergson to confuse art and philosophy; for although Bergson was quick to recognize their similarities he did not recognize their differences which are based on their reasons for investigation and their methods of expression. Bergson, in failing to recognize these differences, has been led to believe that philosophy can obtain its particular goals by utilizing art's unique method of expression. Insofar as Bergson attempted to achieve philosophical goals by the methods of expression employed by art, he failed. This attempt by Bergson led to a further confusion by his commentators: they thought that his philosophy was art--more particularly, poetry--and, what is worse, that

³ Stevens, The Necessary Angel, 25.

⁴ Many books have been written on this subject; see for example, A. B. Fallico, Art and Existentialism, S. Sontag, Against Interpretation, K. Harries, The Meaning of Modern Art to mention only a few.

philosophy should be done as art! .

Bergson is above all a great poet. I give him the title to do him honor and not at all in the deprecatory sense in which certain critics use the term. After all it is the poets who are the true immortals, and they have an advantage over the philosophers in that they make every one take an interest in spiritual moods and imaginative passions.⁵

Turquet-Milnes' glorification of Bergson as poet is only commendable given that he too makes the same mistake that Bergson makes in confusing art and philosophy. A similar error is made by William James--although much more audaciously--when he writes in a letter to Bergson commenting on Creative Evolution:

Oh, my Bergson, you are a magician [poetic magician] and your book is a marvel, a real wonder. . . . You may be amused at the comparison, but in finishing it I found the same after-taste remaining as after finishing Madame Bovary, such a flavor of persistent euphony, as of a rich river that never foamed or ran thin, but steadily and firmly proceeded with its banks full to the brim. Then the aptness of your illustrations, that never scratch or stand out at right angles, but invariably simplify the thought and help to pour it along. . . . [ad nauseam] (C.E., ix-x)

It is frightening to think what James might have written about Madame Bovary. One final example to illustrate this confusion has been provided by Enid Starkie in her article "Bergson and Literature," in which, by the way, she

⁵ Turquet-Milnes, Some Modern French Writers, 78.

prefaces her remarks by saying: "I am not a trained philosopher, and I do not even know Bergson's work very well. I do not think that I would even go so far as to claim that I understand all [or any of] his ideas."⁶

However, after this confession she goes on to claim:

He himself was first and foremost an artist, and a great many of his most telling efforts came from the beauty and harmony of his style. As a poet, ideas did not seem to exist for him until they had crystallized in an image. He was a poet in language--we see that in his use of metaphor. In his Introduction to Metaphysics, he says: 'Is it astonishing that, like children trying to catch smoke by closing their hands, philosophers so often see the object they would grasp fly away before them?' This is a literary image rather than a philosophic concept. [Herein lies the problem.] He was a poet with a beautifully modulated voice. Those with this gift of the tongue have always given the impression of visionary powers. . . . Bergson's eloquent and precise language [note Starkie's example of Bergson's precise language] held his audience enthralled. . . . It was like perfect and beautiful music, captivating the mind⁷

Had this appeared earlier we might have assumed that she collaborated with James. It is doubtful that any self-respecting philosopher would take Turquet-Milnes', James' or Starkie's eulogizing as a compliment, and rightfully so. The reason is that the philosopher's strength lies in his ability to argue convincingly and not in his poetic imagination. Wallace Stevens makes a similar point, when, after

⁶ Starkie, "Bergson and Literature," in The Bergsonian Heritage, edited by Thomas Hanna, 74.

⁷ Starkie, "Bergson and Literature," 93-94.

having defined poetry as "an unofficial view of being" and philosophy as "an official view of being" he goes on to claim:

To define poetry as an unofficial view of being places it in contrast with philosophy and at the same time establishes the relationship between the two. In philosophy we attempt to approach truth through reason [argumentation]. . . . In poetry we attempt to approach truth through the imagination. . . .⁸

Merely to state the similarities and differences between philosophy and art is not enough. We must attempt to examine them more carefully. It does not appear that it will be fruitful to examine their similarities because the importance lies in their differences. It is precisely these differences which constitute the main thesis of this chapter. Let us turn, then, to the two important differences we mentioned, namely, their different reasons for investigating the same object and their methods of expression. We shall discuss them together for it is difficult if not impossible to separate the two.

Philosophy may examine Pure Duration in order to convince others either of its existence or of its importance; it may want to examine a particular aspect of reality in order that it might better understand all of reality. Philosophers are not discouraged when they learn they

⁸ Stevens, The Necessary Angel, 40-41.

cannot understand or express Pure Duration; it might even be said that they receive a certain amount of impetus from the fact that they cannot do either. Because we cannot say everything there is to say about Pure Duration, they argue, is no reason to remain totally ignorant or silent. We can know and express some aspects of Pure Duration, they continue, and hence we are content to express what we can. In order to accomplish anything by means of argument, philosophers must argue convincingly. They must work within well-defined philosophical boundaries. These philosophical boundaries--logic, discursive language, argumentation, validity, assertions (either true or false)--set the limits of philosophy. They preclude the possibility of expressing or illuminating everything at once. Whenever philosophy opens a few doors, many still remain closed and some remain permanently locked; no philosophical key will ever open them. It is these doors which art can unlock for everyone to enter at will. This, of course, does not mean that art is without limitations, only that it can do things which philosophy cannot do and should not attempt. When philosopher becomes poet or poet becomes philosopher the result is usually bad poetry and even worse philosophy. Goethe made a remark to Eckermann (January 18, 1825) which is well worth mentioning: "Lord Byron is only great when he writes poetry; as soon as he reasons he is a child."⁹

⁹Eckermann, Conversations with Goethe, 52.

This epigram, Kaufmann claims,

says briefly and convincingly what Plato often said much more emphatically: in matters of philosophy, poets are suspect, and it is foolish to suppose that a great poet must be, or is probably, a great philosopher or thinker. On the contrary, it is inherently unlikely.¹⁰

As we have already mentioned, the reverse is also usually disastrous. When a philosopher attempts to substitute literary devices in place of arguments the result is a rather spurious and usually untenable philosophy. At times, as we shall show later, Bergson is guilty of this kind of substitution. Occasionally, however, there is born a poet-philosopher who is successful to a limited degree in fusing poetry and philosophy: Plato with his dialogues and surely Nietzsche with Thus Spoke Zarathustra. But these exceptions are rare and it might well be argued that Zarathustra at its best ceases to be philosophy and becomes poetry. The boundary, then, between philosophy and poetry is often undefined and at times the two can overlap; but as we said these occurrences are rare and we shall concern ourselves with those cases which are far more clear-cut.

The real difficulty in fusing art and philosophy becomes apparent when we begin to understand the problem of somehow expressing the knowledge gained about Pure Duration through intuition by either philosopher or artist.

¹⁰ Kaufmann, From Shakespeare to Existentialism, 272-273.

As Hegel quite aptly puts it in the Preface to the Phenomenology of Mind:

If . . . truth exists merely in what, or rather exists merely as what, is called at one time intuition, at another immediate knowledge of the Absolute, Religion, Being . . . from that point of view it is rather the opposite of the notional or conceptual form which would be required for systematic philosophical exposition. The Absolute on this view is not to be grasped in conceptual form, but felt, intuited; it is not its conception, but the feeling of it and intuition of it that are to have the say and find expression.¹¹

That Bergson himself was aware of this problem is quite evident from the following quotations:

Intuition [let us say of Pure Duration] will be communicated only by the intelligence. It is more than idea; nevertheless in order to be transmitted, it will have to use ideas as a conveyance. It will prefer, however, to have recourse to the most concrete ideas, but those which still retain an outer fringe of images. Comparisons and metaphors will here suggest what cannot be expressed. . . . Let us not be duped by appearances: there are cases in which it is imagery in language which knowingly expresses the literal meaning, and abstract language which unconsciously expresses itself figuratively. (C.M., 42-43)

But that inner experience of which we speak will nowhere find a strictly appropriate language. It will of course be compelled to return to the concept, with at most the addition of the image; but then it will have to enlarge the concept, make it more flexible, and indicate, by the colored shading around the edges, that it does not contain the whole of experience. (C.M., 45)

¹¹ Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, 71. (Hegel has in mind Bergson's predecessors, Jacobi, Schlegel and Schleiermacher.)

It is precisely Bergson's recognition of the problem of expression which leads him into the confusion of art and philosophy. He wants to attempt to explain Pure Duration and in order to do this he must use language; however, as we have seen, he has already compounded the problem by claiming that language by its very nature distorts reality. Language distorts Pure Duration insofar as it is not reality itself. Language makes static that which is a dynamic process. Philosophers become taxidermists, stuffing and mounting language in order to represent and preserve Pure Duration. Bergson attempts to remain within the philosophical boundaries set, as we have said, by discursive language, argumentation, etc., but when he finds this too restrictive he hurdles the boundaries and jumps head first into a pseudo-art. Alexander also recognizes Bergson's quandary:

Although he [Bergson] employs the usual discursive techniques when required, what most characterizes his exposition is the use of imagery. . . . As he sees it, the aim of the intuitive philosopher is to excite at each stage of his reflection corresponding intuitions in the mind of the reader. . . . An image cannot itself replace an intuition, but it can be used as an element in a dialectic of images. (B., 17)

Bergson puts it thus:

The image has at least this advantage [over the concept], that it keeps us in the concrete. No image can replace the intuition of duration, but

many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized. (I.M., 16)

And again to return to Alexander for a moment:

The philosopher, by the choice of conflicting images, can assure that the mind does not succumb to the temptation of repose. Far then from being merely decorative [as Russell claims], Bergson's use of imagery is part of a veritable maieutic or dialectical method of communication. (B., 18)

One of the problems that arises from these passages is just how the terms "image" and "concept" are being employed by Bergson. This is not an easy problem to solve because it does not appear that Bergson himself is very clear on this matter. He devotes a great deal of time to discussing "image" in Matter and Memory, but the only attempt at a definition of image is the one which we have already mentioned in a footnote:

a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing,--an existence placed half-way between the 'thing' and the 'representation.' (M. & M., xi-xii)

But here he is using "image" in order to define matter; matter is an aggregate of such "images." However, more often than not when Bergson refers to images--that is, without reference to matter--he means a kind of literary or poetic image. This appears to be the case in the passages

just cited. It would also appear that J. McKellar Stewart, a well-known commentator on Bergson, would agree when he interprets Bergson's philosopher as the

philosopher [who] will range himself alongside the artist and the poet. He will, like them, express himself through metaphor, image, and symbol, clear conceptual expression being reserved to the products of the scientific intelligence.¹²

The concept on the other hand is related to the symbol. Bergson, however, is not using "symbol" in the same sense as Stewart is in the above quotation. When Bergson uses the term "symbol" sometimes he means "mathematical symbols,"¹³ and other times he merely means words, particularly substantives. Concepts, then, like mathematical symbols, distort reality because they tend to make static that which is a dynamic process. Hence we can never get from a concept to Pure Duration.

Concepts . . . have the disadvantage [in contrast to images] of being in reality symbols substituted for the object they symbolize. . . . These concepts, laid side by side, never actually give us more than an artificial reconstruction of the object, of which they can only symbolize certain general, and, in a way, impersonal aspects; it is

¹² Stewart, A Critical Exposition of Bergson's Philosophy, 14.

¹³ Another problem arises here when some philosophers and theologians--Buber and Tillich, for example--would not refer to these as symbols but rather as signs. Signs, unlike symbols, are easily translated into other languages and have a kind of fixed meaning.

therefore useless to believe that with them we can seize a reality of which they present to us the shadow alone. . . . Thus the different concepts that we form of the properties of a thing inscribe round it so many circles, each much too large and none of them fitting it exactly. (I.M., 17-19)

Just when we think we are beginning to understand what Bergson means by concept--namely, that it is a kind of vague static description of something which is dynamic--he makes the following claim:

Concepts, as we shall show elsewhere, generally go together in couples and represent two contraries. There is hardly any concrete reality which cannot be observed from two opposing standpoints, which cannot consequently be subsumed under two antagonistic concepts. Hence a thesis and an antithesis which we endeavor in vain to reconcile logically, for the very simple reason that it is impossible, with concepts and observations taken from outside points of view, to make a thing. But from the object, seized by intuition, we pass easily in many cases to the two contrary concepts; and as in that way thesis and antithesis can be seen to spring from reality, we grasp at the same time how it is that the two are opposed and how they are reconciled. (I.M., 39-40)

Now, concepts turn out to be the method by which the intellect attempts to express its particular kind of knowledge, while images attempt to express the knowledge gained by intuition. However, for the most part Bergson's entire "concept of concepts" remains confused.

We shall take Bergson generally to mean by concept "mere words" as opposed to words which when combined create a poetic image, metaphor or some other literary device

which we shall mention later. That in general Bergson had this in mind may be indicated by the following:

The words may then have been well chosen, they will not convey the whole of what we wish to make them say if we do not succeed by the rhythm, by the punctuation, by the relative lengths of sentences and parts of sentences, by a particular dancing of the sentence, in making the reader's mind, continually guided by a series of nascent movements, describe a curve of thought and feeling analogous to that we ourselves describe. In this consists the whole art of writing. (M.E., 56-57)

We are back once again to the problem of "philosopher or poet?" However, it must be noted that Bergson himself did not think that even art could express Pure Duration, even though he repeatedly turns to artistic devices in hopes of making his position more precise. That he felt art was also bound and gagged with language can be clearly seen in the following quotation:

Now, if some bold novelist, tearing aside the cleverly woven curtain of our conventional ego, shows us under this appearance of logic a fundamental absurdity, under this juxtaposition of simple states an infinite permeation of a thousand different impressions which have already ceased to exist the instant they are named, we commend him for having known us better than we knew ourselves. This is not the case, however, and the very fact that he spreads out our feeling in a homogeneous time [mathematical time or duration], and expresses its elements by words, shows that he in his turn is only offering us its shadow: but he has arranged this shadow in such a way as to make us suspect the extraordinary and illogical nature of the object which projects it; he has made us reflect by giving outward expression to something of that contradiction, that interpenetration [Pure Duration], which is the very essence of the elements expressed. (T. & F.W., 133-134)

There was, of course, as yet no stream of consciousness writing,¹⁴ no Proust or Joyce and certainly no Theatre of the Absurd. It is quite understandable, then, why Bergson in this, his first work, did not see the possibilities of art as a means of communicating Pure Duration more successfully than philosophy.

We have mentioned several reasons why the philosopher might want to examine Pure Duration and the method he must use if he is to be at all convincing. But what about the artist? Throughout this thesis we have used the term "art" to refer to all the arts, but now we shall limit ourselves to one particular art form which we feel best illustrates the kind of approach art in general can take to the problem of expression. We shall use the theatre as our prime example and more specifically the Theatre of the Absurd; for it appears that the Theatre of the Absurd illustrates at once the relationship and the difference between art and philosophy. Both wish to examine the human situation--hence their alliance; and each has different methods of expressing it--and therein lies their difference. The theatre appears to be much more successful, but perhaps that is because, unlike philosophy, it is not attempting to convince anyone of anything. It merely attempts to

¹⁴ Dorothy Richardson in her four volume work Pilgrimage written between the years 1915 and 1938 was one of the first to experiment with this literary method which attempted to express existence as Pure Duration.

present the human situation, which the playwrights take to be absurd. They want to attempt to enable others to have this same experience or knowledge of existence.¹⁵ They are closely akin to Bergson in realizing the limitations of language, but unlike Bergson they are not limited to the use of language and in particular to discursive language. They want to express a dynamic process, difficult to do with words because words tend to make the process static. As Claude Mauriac says in his essay on Beckett:

[anyone] who speaks is carried along by the logic of language and its articulations. Thus the writer who pits himself against the unsayable must use all his cunning so as not to say what the words make him say against his will, but to express instead what by their very nature they are designed to cover up:¹⁶ the uncertain, the contradictory, the unthinkable.

This has led Beckett to write in a foreign tongue in a bitter struggle to force language to accomplish his task. Beckett, like Bergson, wants to get to the fundamental self, a self which by its very nature is change.

¹⁵ At times Bergson claims that this is the function of philosophy; however, generally--and, we wish to claim, more accurately--Bergson thinks that the function of philosophy is to study Pure Duration and provide a philosophical explanation of it. Bergson also states, "What I wanted was a philosophy which would submit to the control of science and which in turn could enable science to progress." (C.M., 66) See also Creative Evolution, 185, 215.

¹⁶ Mauriac, L'Allittérature Contemporaine, 83, quoted in T.A., 9.

In Beckett's Waiting for Godot everyone is waiting for someone, something which may or may not exist--Godot. It is a play about time, Bergson's Pure Duration, which is constant change and flux. It is doubtful that the characters would recognize Godot even if he did appear, for at times they are not sure they recognize each other, or even themselves. Pozzo and Lucky have appeared several times with Vladimir and Estragon, the friends who are waiting for Godot. But Vladimir comments that Pozzo and Lucky have changed since their last appearance and Estragon insists that he does not know them.

Vladimir: Yes you do know them.

Estragon: No I don't know them.

Vladimir: We know them, I tell you. You forget everything, (Pause. To himself) Unless they're not the same. . .

Estragon: Why didn't they recognize us then?

Vladimir: That means nothing. I too pretended not to recognize them. And then nobody ever recognizes us. (Godot, I, 39)

Then later in the second act Pozzo cannot recognize them:

I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But to-morrow I won't remember having met anyone to-day.
(Godot, II, 76-77)

Beckett does not wish to philosophize about the human situation; he does not want to argue for or against it; he is not interested, as Bergson is, in attempting to

prove that there are two ways of looking at time--such as Pure Duration and mathematical time. Beckett wants his audience to know, in the sense of experience, what it is to be aware of the human situation. This cannot be accomplished with discursive language; it cannot be argued for at all; hence Beckett "presents" an experience of Pure Duration and what it is like to be aware of it. As Pozzo exclaims in his great tirade:

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! . . . One day, is that not enough for you, . . . one day we shall die, the same day, the same second. . . . They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (Godot, II, 77-78)

There are no arguments here; it is true that with a little effort we could transform these lines, or the entire play for that matter, into a philosophical position: merely the claim that the world or the human situation is not as absurd or as hopeless as it appears to Pozzo. Then to show this we would have to use philosophical methods; we would have to argue; we would have to be consistent; in short, we would have to use discursive language and remain within the philosophical boundaries defined by the limitations of discursive speech.

In an earlier chapter we spoke about Bergson's reasons for saying that the intellect was incapable of understanding Pure Duration. The primary reason is that

the intellect by its very nature observes things with a view toward action; it performs acts habitually and does not wish to expend the effort needed to break habits in order to get a glimpse of existence.

The duty of philosophy . . . was to lay down the general conditions of the direct, immediate observation of oneself by oneself. This inner observation is warped by habits we have developed. . . . Our person appears to us just as it is "in itself," as soon as we free ourselves of the habits contracted for our greater convenience. (C.M., 27-28)

This is also Beckett's position, hinted at earlier when we quoted Beckett on habit. We shall now cite the passage more fully:

Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals. . . . Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects. The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations . . . represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being. . . . The suffering of being: that is the free play of every faculty. Because the pernicious devotion of habit paralyses our attention, drugs those handmaidens of perception whose cooperation is not absolutely essential.¹⁷

This is partly what Waiting for Godot is about.

¹⁷ Beckett, Proust, 19-20.

The characters in the play have pastimes which are all designed to prevent them from thinking--that is, from seeing the human situation as it really is. In Bergsonian terms they are existing on the level of the superficial self, and what Beckett wants is for his audience to become aware of another self--the fundamental self of Bergson. However, whereas Bergson attempts to argue for the fundamental self, Beckett presents it as an experience. Both Beckett and Bergson recognize the difficulties in attempting to express such a process. Bergson, however, thinks that he can intersperse with his philosophical arguments literary devices, that is, poetic imagery, metaphor and the like. But he is mistaken. Imagery is not argumentation or a substitute for it; Bergson only manages to weaken his philosophical position when he attempts to utilize this ploy. Irwin Edman in his foreword to Creative Evolution says:

[Creative Evolution] is marked by his extraordinary gift for philosophical images, such as that of life being the skyrocket bursting in air, and matter being the dead ashes falling down, or again of reality being a line in the drawing rather than the line drawn. (C.E., xvii)

He obviously thinks he is paying Bergson a compliment; however, it is only a compliment--like the others we have cited--if we think poetical images can ever replace argumentation; this is the basic confusion between art and

philosophy which we have attempted to establish. Bergson is not strengthening his philosophical position when he "poeticizes" in the following quotations:

Let us imagine a vessel full of steam at a high pressure, and here and there in its sides a crack through which the steam is escaping in a jet. The steam thrown into the air is nearly all condensed into little drops which fall back, and this condensation and this fall represent simply the loss of something, an interruption, a deficit. But a small part of the jet of steam subsists, uncondensed, for some seconds; it is making an effort to raise the drops which are falling; it succeeds at most in retarding their fall. So, from an immense reservoir of life, jets must be gushing out unceasingly, of which each, falling back, is a world. (C.E., 269-270)

The animal takes its stand on the plant, man bestrides animality, and the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death. (C.E., 295)

Not only is this bad philosophy--if it is philosophy at all--but it is poor poetry, if this is what Bergson's commentators are referring to when they are praising his poetic imagery.

Bergson, although aware of the problem of expressing change or Pure Duration or even Being, fails to arrive at any satisfactory solution. His failure is compounded when he attempts a solution outside of philosophy, that is, in art; when he does this, not only is he confronted with the problem of expression but also with the problem of confusing

the purpose of literary devices with the purpose of philosophical argumentation.

Beckett's plays are attempts to show the limitations of language in communicating any kind of knowledge, but particularly knowledge of existence and of Pure Duration.

As Esslin puts it:

Beckett's use of the stage is an attempt to reduce the gap between the limitations of language and the intuition of being, the sense of the human situation he seeks to express in spite of his strong feeling that words are inadequate to formulate it. The concreteness and three-dimensional nature of the stage can be used to add new resources to language as an instrument of thought and exploration of being. (T.A., 44)

Beckett wants to express those things which he himself realizes are impossible to express, yet he makes the attempt.

The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction. And art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication. Even on the rare occasions when word and gesture happen to be valid expressions of personality, they lose their significance on their passage through the cataract of the personality that is opposed to them. Either we speak and act for ourselves--in which case speech and action are distorted and emptied of their meaning by an intelligence that is not ours, or else we speak and act for others--in which case we speak and act a lie.¹⁸

He wants to turn away "from the field of the possible" towards

¹⁸ Beckett, Proust, 64.

the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.¹⁹

So we see that Beckett's view of language is similar to Bergson's, insofar as Beckett realizes the difficulty of expressing conceptual thought, the human situation or Pure Duration. Beckett, however, goes further than Bergson. Beckett claims that even the Theatre of the Absurd cannot express the human situation completely. And although we have pointed out earlier that Bergson too recognized the limitation of art he was referring to a kind of art which was as yet not aware of the new modes of expression to which art has since turned. Beckett's use of language must continually be viewed paradoxically as an attempt to communicate that which is essentially impossible to communicate. However, as we mentioned before and shall have reason to repeat again and again they are attempting to communicate for quite different reasons. And these differences are precisely what determine their mode of expression.

Marshall McLuhan, who apparently wishes to go as far as Beckett in devaluating language, and perhaps further, makes the following claim in reference to Bergson's communication problem.

¹⁹Beckett, Three Dialogues with George Duthuit, 103.

Language does for intelligence what the wheel does for the feet and the body. It enables them to move from thing to thing with greater ease and speed and ever less involvement. Language extends and amplifies man but it also divides his faculties. His collective consciousness or intuitive awareness is diminished by his technical extension of consciousness that is speech.²⁰

McLuhan sees at least part of the answer to overcoming the language problem in

our new electric technology that extends our senses and nerves in a global embrace. . . . Electric technology does not need words any more than the digital computer needs numbers. Electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself, on a world scale, and without any verbalization whatever.²¹

But unlike Beckett and Bergson it is doubtful that McLuhan thinks the limitations of language arise out of the problem of expressing the human situation. For McLuhan it appears that our electronic progress is the main reason for the current language devaluation.

Another view of language which is essentially the same as Bergson's and Beckett's is that of Ionesco. He too sees the problem in attempting to communicate a reality which by its very nature defies communication. The attempt to express this is the function of art. Ionesco writes:

A work of art is the expression of an incommunicable reality that one tries to communicate--and

²⁰ McLuhan, Understanding Media, 83.

²¹ McLuhan, Understanding Media, 83.

which sometimes can be communicated. That is its paradox and its truth. (T.A., 81)

All three, Bergson, Beckett and Ionesco, recognize the limitations of language when it comes to expressing the human situation. However Beckett and Ionesco and for that matter all artists have other means at their disposal. It is true that some philosophers--Heidegger is the best example--have tried to surmount the language problem and have kept well within the philosophical boundaries by a kind of etymological approach; but their success, if any, has been extremely limited. On the other hand, writers of the Theatre of the Absurd have a variety of alternative methods open to them which keep the use of language to a very minimum. The theatre (whenever we refer to the theatre we mean the Theatre of the Absurd) has no boundaries; it can do anything. As Ionesco says of it:

Everything is permitted in the theatre: to bring characters to life, but also to materialize states of anxiety, inner presences. It is thus not only permitted, but advisable, to make the properties join in the action, to make objects live, to animate the décor, to make symbols concrete. Just as words are continued by gesture, action, mime, which, at the moment when words become inadequate, take their place, the material elements of the stage can in turn further intensify these.²²

There are two reasons why these techniques are

²² Ionesco, "Expérience du Théâtre," Nouvelle Revue Française, Paris (February 1, 1958), 253, quoted in T.A., 132.

successful: one is the very nature of that which they are attempting to communicate; the other, even more important, is the fact that the artists here do not attempt to convince or argue for any purpose or position as the philosopher does. They know what it means to be aware of oneself--of the fundamental self--and they want to attempt to communicate this awareness. For example, they want the audience to know what it is to live in the knowledge that death is inevitable. Moreover, they want them to know in the same sense that Beckett and Ionesco know--not in any trivial way. We all know we shall eventually die, just as we know we have to eat, sleep and work; it is common knowledge, or perhaps we might say habitual knowledge, and hence in a very real sense we are not aware of it, perhaps because it is always in the future. We say: someday I shall die; my day will come; sooner or later we all have to die, etc. But when death becomes imminent, our view of death changes. Finally that nebulous death of the future is made present; we are now face to face with it. Dostoevsky in The Idiot describes what it means to be face to face with death, what it means to the condemned man who is now in front of the firing squad and in a matter of seconds is about to die. Dostoevsky himself was in this exact situation and at the last second was granted a reprieve. The incident in The Idiot is more than a mere description that we read and calmly nod our heads over in understanding. Its impact on

readers can never be produced in a philosophical treatise. And this, to a limited extent, is why Heidegger eventually fails in his attempt to force us to come to terms with death. He attempts to convince us, but his method of expression precludes the kind of knowledge necessary to achieve this end, and hence death still remains in the future. This is also the reason for Bergson's failure when he attempts to argue for the awareness of the fundamental self. His arguments, when they exist, do not convince, and his substitution of imagery when all else fails is even less convincing. Philosophy cannot, and perhaps should not even try, to communicate an experience. But art, not only should, but can with various degrees of success, perform this function. As Esslin says:

To wake up the audience, to deepen their awareness of the human condition . . . is the real purpose of Ionesco's play[s]. . . . Ionesco's theatre [as well as all the Theatre of the Absurd] is a poetic theatre, a theatre concerned with the communication of the experience of states of being, which are the most difficult matters to communicate; for language, consisting largely of prefabricated, congealed symbols, tends to obscure rather than to reveal personal experience. (T.A., 134-135)

How successful the communication of Bergson's Pure Duration or Beckett's or Ionesco's human situation is, will depend to a large extent on the invention of different techniques which go beyond language. The techniques which are available to the philosopher are limited, but for the

artist and in particular for writers of Absurd Theatre they are unlimited. Esslin mentions only a few, from the

coexistence of opposing explanations for the same thing [P~P], discontinuity of dialogue, and the raising of false expectations, to purely stylistic devices like cliché, truism, onomatopoeia, surrealist proverbs, nonsense use of foreign languages, and complete loss of sense, the degeneration of language into pure assonance and sound patterns. . . . the animation and proliferation of objects, the loss of homogeneity of individual characters who change their natures in front of our eyes, the various mirror effects in which the play itself becomes an object of discussion within the play, the use of offstage dialogue. . . . the loss of distinction between animate and inanimate objects. . . . the use of onstage metamorphosis, and a host of others. (T.A., 136-137)

How can philosophy attempt to compete with these techniques? Of course the real question is why should it want to? And the answer seems to be that it should not; it happens only when philosophers confuse art and philosophy. Philosophy cannot express an experience and when the philosopher makes an attempt to do so he is reduced to the babbling of Lucky in Beckett's play, when, after having had his thinking hat placed on his head, he begins to philosophize in a manner reminiscent of Bergson and Heidegger:

Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged

in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so . . . calm which even though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labors left unfinished crowned by the Acacacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labors of men that as a result of the labors unfinished of Testew and Cunard it is established as hereinafter but not so fast for reasons unknown that as a result of the public works of Puncher and Wattmann it is established beyond all doubt that in view of the labors of Fartov and Belcher left unfinished for reasons unknown of Testew and Cunard left unfinished it is established what many deny that man in Possy of Testew and Cunard that man in Essy that man in short that man in brief in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation wastes and pines wastes and pines and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the strides of physical culture the practice of sports such as tennis football running cycling swimming flying floating riding gliding conating camogie skating tennis of all kinds dying flying sports of all sorts autumn summer winter winter tennis of all kinds hockey of all sorts penicilline and succedanea in a word I resume flying gliding golf over nine and eighteen holes tennis of all sorts in a word for reasons unknown in Feckham Peckham Fulham Clapham namely concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown but time will tell fades away I resume Fulham Clapham in a word the dead loss per head since the death of Bishop Berkeley being to the tune of one inch four ounce per head approximately by and large more or less to the nearest decimal good measure round figures stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara in a word for reasons unknown no matter what matter the facts are there and considering what is more much more grave that in the light of the labors of Steinweg and Peterman it . . . (Godot, I, 34-35)

Vladimir removes Lucky's hat and he is silenced. Similarly Bergson says:

such is also the truceless warfare of the waves on the surface of the sea, whilst profound peace reigns in the depths below. The billows clash and collide with each other, as they strive to find their level. A fringe of snow-white foam, feathery and frolicsome, follows their changing outlines. From time to time, the receding wave leaves behind a remnant of foam on the sandy beach. The child, who plays hard by, picks up a handful, and, the next moment, is astonished to find that nothing remains in his grasp but a few drops of water, water that is far more brackish, far more bitter, than that of the wave which brought it. Laughter comes into being in the self-same fashion. It indicates a slight revolt on the surface of social life. It instantly adopts the changing forms of the disturbance. It, also, is a froth with a saline base. Like froth it sparkles. It is gaiety itself. But the philosopher who gathers a handful to taste may find that the substance is scanty, and the after-taste bitter [similar to James' 'after-taste' no doubt]. (Laughter, 189-190)

And finally Heidegger's tirade:

"Assertion" means no less than "predication." We 'assert' a 'predicate' of a 'subject,' and the 'subject' is given a definite character by the 'predicate.' In this signification of "assertion," that which is put forward in the assertion is not the predicate, but 'the hammer itself.' On the other hand, that which does the asserting (in other words, that which gives something a definite character) lies in the 'too heavy.' . . . It is not by giving something a definite character that we first discover that which shows itself--the hammer--as such; but when we give it such a character, our seeing gets restricted to it in the first instance, so that by this explicit rejection of our view, that which is already manifest may be made explicitly manifest in its definite character. . . . In 'setting down the subject,' we dim entities down to focus in 'that hammer there.' . . . Setting down the subject, setting down the predicate, and setting down the two together, are thoroughly 'apophantical' in the strict sense of the word.²³

²³ Heidegger, Being and Time, 196-197 (154-155). We must point out that we are not being fair to Heidegger by

Unfortunately we cannot remove Heidegger's or Bergson's hat. On the other hand we should now at least be in a better position to understand their predicament. What they are attempting to argue for is important. We have never doubted that. We have only maintained that, at least in Bergson's case, he has often attempted to argue with poetic, literary or dramatic devices which are not capable of performing the task of the philosopher. We can only hope that Bergsonian philosophers or those who attempt to argue for Pure Duration, existence, etc., are not reduced by this handicap to the logician in Ionesco's play Rhinoceros, who remains within the philosophical boundaries to the point of absurdity.

The characters have been sitting at a sidewalk cafe when suddenly a rhinoceros charges down the middle of the street, followed several minutes later by another. The characters begin to argue about whether or not there were two rhinoceroses or one, and whether it was an Asian or African type and which species has a single horn and

quoting him out of context and the possibility exists that some sense can be made from this passage when returned to context. We should also emphasize that we are not accusing Heidegger of the same mistake that Bergson makes--that is, using literary devices in lieu of argumentation--but rather, even though he remains within the philosophical boundaries, he is faced with the same problem of expression. And although Heidegger's attempt at a solution may be philosophically more commendable, he too ultimately fails and is at times reduced to the logician in Ionesco's play Rhinoceros which is cited here.

and which has two. The logician attempts to set them straight (like most logicians) in the following manner:

Logician: You see, you have got away from the problem which instigated the debate. In the first place you were deliberating whether or not the rhinoceros which passed by just now was the same one that passed by earlier, or whether it was another. That is the question to decide.

Berenger: Yes, but how?

Logician: Thus: you may have seen on two occasions a single rhinoceros bearing a single horn
• • •

Grocer (repeating the words, as if to understand better): On two occasions a single rhinoceros . . .

Proprietor (doing the same): Bearing a single horn . . .

Logician: . . . or you may have seen on two occasions a single rhinoceros with two horns.

Old Gentleman (repeating the words): A single rhinoceros with two horns on two occasions
• • •

Logician: Exactly. Or again, you may have seen one rhinoceros with one horn, and then another also with a single horn.

Grocer's Wife (from window): Ha, ha . . .

Logician: Or again, an initial rhinoceros with two horns, followed by a second with two horns
• • •

Proprietor: That's true.

Logician: Now, if you had seen . . .

Grocer: If we'd seen . . .

Old Gentleman: Yes, if we'd seen . . .

Logician: If on the first occasion you had seen a rhinoceros with two horns . . .

Proprietor: With two horns . . .

Logician: And on the second occasion, a rhinoceros with one horn . . .

Grocer: With one horn . . .

Logician: That wouldn't be conclusive either.

Old Gentleman: Even that wouldn't be conclusive.

Proprietor: Why not?

Grocer's Wife: Oh, I don't get it at all.

Grocer: Shoo! Shoo!

The Grocer's Wife shrugs her shoulders and withdraws from her window.

Logician: For it is possible that since its first appearance, the rhinoceros may have lost one of its horns, and that the first and second transit were still made by a single beast.

Berenger: I see, but . . .

Old Gentleman (interrupting Berenger): Don't interrupt!

Logician: It may also be that two rhinoceroses both with two horns may each have lost a horn.

Old Gentleman: That is possible.

Proprietor: Yes, that's possible.

Grocer: Why not?

Berenger: Yes, but in any case . . .

Old Gentleman (to Berenger): Don't interrupt.

Logician: If you could prove that on the first occasion you saw a rhinoceros with one horn, either Asiatic or African . . .

Old Gentleman: Asiatic or African . . .

Logician: And on the second occasion a rhinoceros
with two horns . . .

Grocer: One with two . . .

Logician: No matter whether African or Asiatic. . .

Old Gentleman: African or Asiatic . . .

Logician: . . . we could then conclude that we were
dealing with two different rhinoceroses,
for it is hardly likely that a second horn
could grow sufficiently in a space of a
few minutes to be visible on the nose of
a rhinoceros.

Old Gentleman: It's hardly likely.

Logician (enchanted with his discourse): That would
imply one rhinoceros either Asiatic or
African . . .

Old Gentleman: Asiatic or African . . .

Logician: . . . and one rhinoceros either African
or Asiatic.

Proprietor: African or Asiatic.

Grocer: Er . . . yais.

Logician: For good logic cannot entertain the
possibility that the same creature be
born in two places at the same time . . .

Old Gentleman: Or even successively.

Logician (to Old Gentleman): Which was to be
proved.

Berenger (to Logician): That seems clear enough,
but it doesn't answer the question.

Logician (to Berenger, with a knowledgeable smile):
Obviously, my dear sir, but now the prob-
lem is correctly posed.

Old Gentleman: It's quite logical. Quite logical.

Logician (Raising his hat): Good-bye, gentlemen.²⁴

Raising his hat, Bergson leaves us with the problem of philosophy correctly posed but with no way of solving it without the aid of the artist.

²⁴Ionesco, Rhinoceros, 402-404.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Before concluding perhaps we ought to return to the notion of intuition for a moment in order to review just how Bergson's intuitive method is a tool of both the artist and the philosopher. We must remember, however, that intuition can be the proper tool only if we concede Bergson's claim that the intellect is incapable of examining or comprehending reality--and further--only if reality is, as Bergson claims, a constantly changing flux.

We have attempted to show that the most important limiting factor of the intellect is its inability to see things without a view toward action. The intellect wants to know what and how it can use whatever it is dealing with. In order to do this it must be capable of seeing relationships. It must be able to answer the question: how can we use this thing? And the answer to this presupposes a knowledge of relations. It is perhaps akin to the kind of knowledge Heidegger has in mind when he makes the following statement:

The Being of those entities which we encounter as closest to us can be exhibited phenomenologically if we take as our clue our everyday Being-in-the-world, which we also call our "dealings" in the world and with entities within-the-world. Such dealings have already dispersed themselves into

manifold ways of concern. The kind of dealing which is closest to us is as we have shown, not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use; and this has its own kind of 'knowledge.'¹

The intellect is Dasein's way of dealing with Zuhandenheit (things or equipment in the world ready-to-hand) and to be successful it must grasp relationships which are primarily spatial. But for Heidegger as well as for Bergson, to be is to be in time, or to put it in Bergsonian terminology: to exist is to exist in Pure Duration. But for Bergson, the intellect exists in duration, that is it views Pure Duration as mathematical time. Once again it must be pointed out that there are not two kinds of time--Pure Duration and mathematical time--but rather one kind of time, Pure Duration, and a confused method of viewing it, mathematical time. The confusion arises when we think of time in terms of space; mathematical time is spatialized Pure Duration. But this spatialization of Pure Duration distorts it and consequently what we normally take to be an accurate account of Pure Duration is really inaccurate.

That which is commonly called a fact is not reality as it appears to immediate intuition, but an adaptation of the real to the interests of practice and to the exigencies of social life. Pure intuition, external or internal, is that of an undivided continuity. (M. & M. 238-239)

¹Heidegger, Being and Time, 95 (67).

Given this limitation of the intellect--namely, its inability to grasp Pure Duration--then how are we ever to understand human existence, since as we have said, to exist is to exist in Pure Duration? The answer Bergson provides is the intuitive method--a method which enables us to understand Pure Duration as it is in its constant flux. It comprehends Pure Duration directly before the intellect distorts it by expressing it through language.

We instinctively [habitually] tend to solidify our impressions in order to express them in language. Hence we confuse the feeling itself, which is in a perpetual state of becoming, with its permanent external object, and especially with the word which expresses this object Not only does language make us believe in the unchangeableness of our sensations, but it will sometimes deceive us as to the nature of the sensation felt.
(T. & F.W., 130-131)

This of course brings us back to the problem we discussed at some length in the preceding chapter, namely, that of expression. More precisely, the question is what method or discipline can best express the knowledge gained through intuition; and this again leads into the problem of "art versus philosophy." We have maintained that Bergson has confused the functions of both art and philosophy. We have attempted to show that when Bergson runs up against the problem he turns to an artistic method of expression, which we have claimed cannot take the place of philosophical methods. And perhaps what is more important, it must be

made clear that even if these literary devices--sporadically interspersed between philosophical arguments--were lifted out and laid side by side, they would not constitute art. This eliminates the possibility that we could oscillate between literary critic and philosopher and apply the appropriate criteria.

Philosophy as we have defined it must keep within the philosophical boundaries put up by discursive language. We do not deny that philosophy can use metaphors--it does--but we insist that it use appropriate metaphors which serve a philosophical purpose. It must at the very least continue to use language; it would even seem that it would have to maximize the importance of language while the Theatre of the Absurd and contemporary art in general tend to minimize it. When the Absurd Theatre does use language "it uses a language based on patterns of images rather than argument and discursive speech." (T.A., 294) But it is attempting, just as Bergson is, to express an intuition of being or of existence in Pure Duration.

Expressing an intuition in depth, it [the play] should ideally be apprehended in a single moment, and only because it is physically impossible to present so complex an image in an instant does it have to be spread over a period of time. . . . The endeavor to communicate a total sense of being is an attempt to present a truer picture of reality itself, reality as apprehended by an individual. . . . Each of these plays [of the Absurd Theatre] is an answer to the questions "How does this individual feel when confronted with the human situation? What is the basic mood in which he

faces the world? What does it feel like to be him?" And the answer is a single, total, but complex and contradictory poetic image. . . . (T.A., 295)

Esslin recognizes the same kind of limitations of language that Bergson is aware of. In the following quotation Esslin is almost paraphrasing what Bergson calls our "cinematographical" way of viewing Pure Duration and once again recognizes the difficulties involved in expressing Pure Duration as Pure Duration.

Any really fundamental analysis of reality as perceived by man leads to the recognition that any attempt at communicating what we perceive and feel consists of the dissection of a momentary, simultaneous intuition of a complex of perceptions into a sequence of atomized concepts structured in time within a sentence, or a sequence of sentences. To convert our perception into conceptual terms, into logical thought and language, we perform an operation analogous to the scanner that analyzes the picture in a television camera into rows of single impulses. The poetic image, with its ambiguity and its simultaneous evocation of multiple elements of sense associations, is one of the methods by which we can, however, imperfectly, communicate the reality of our intuition of the world. (T.A., 295-296)

But perhaps Esslin, Beckett and McLuhan have gone too far in the opposite direction; they have put too much faith in the success of media which attempt to devalue language to the point of exclusion. We have maintained that art may be better suited than philosophy for the purpose of expressing existence in Pure Duration primarily because of the availability of extra-linguistic techniques which are

not available to philosophy. However, the Theatre of the Absurd, like language, appears to be destined for failure also.

It can remain successful only as long as it can prevent itself from being taken for granted. As soon as it becomes a habit, like language, then another method must be devised to break the habit in order to allow us to escape from the superficial self, average everydayness, and once again return to the fundamental self. Hence the continual experimentation with new art forms which constantly startle us and force us to see the other self.²

Philosophers too can help us recognize the limits of language and, by experimenting within discursive language, can provide philosophy with better linguistic tools to express itself. As Wittgenstein states in the Philosophical Investigations:

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of the discovery.³

² However, this is not the same problem of expression--that is, how we can express Pure Duration--but rather a problem of getting people to note the expressions. And although they are closely related they are in an important sense distinct.

³ Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, (par. 119) 48^e.

Bergson has made us more aware of the problems involved in expression, particularly those of language, but unfortunately he has not been able to overcome those limitations he himself recognized. Although we are inclined to agree with Bergson that "every language, whether elaborated or crude, leaves many more things to be understood than it is able to express," (M. & M., 159) hopefully the philosopher can find a solution within philosophy and need not attempt to circumvent the problem by surreptitiously substituting literary devices, which are designed to perform an entirely different function, in lieu of argumentation.

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